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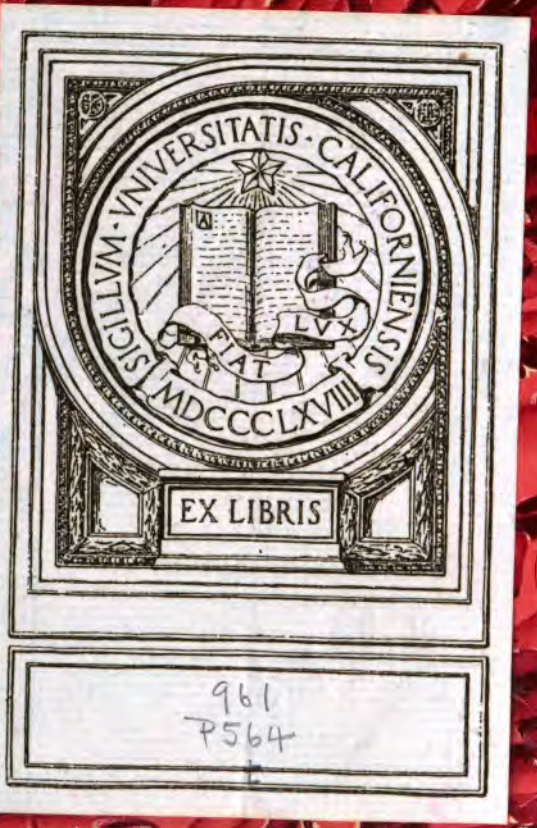
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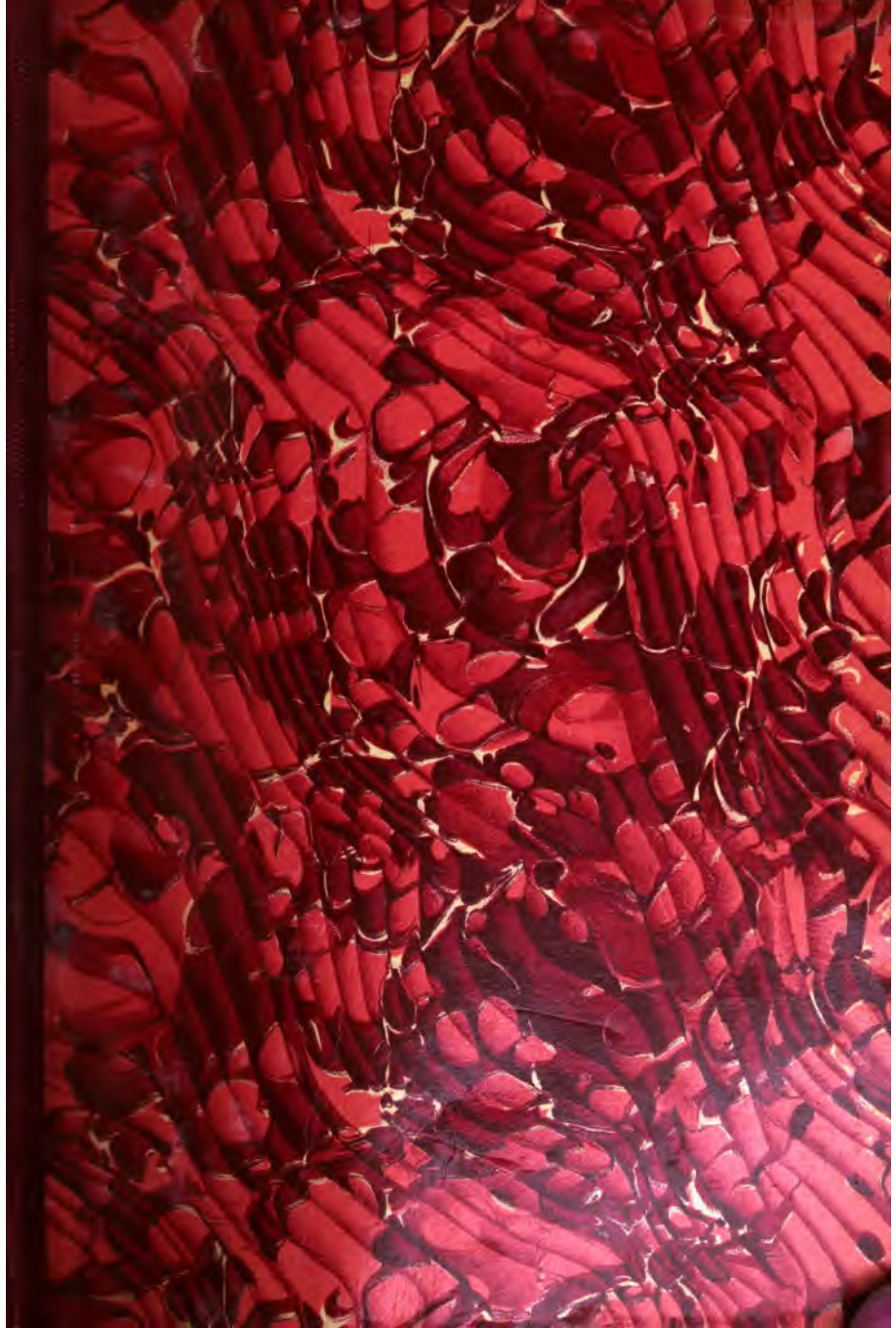

THE THREE BROTHERS

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THE

THREE BROTHERS

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "THE SECRET WOMAN," "THE AMERICAN PRISONER," "CHILDREN OF THE MIST," ETC.

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TO

MY BROTHER

HERBERT MACDONALD PHILLPOTTS

A SMALL TRIBUTE OF

GREAT AFFECTION

190823

Book I

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THE THREE BROTHERS

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

FROM Great Trowlesworthy's crown of rosy granite the world extended to the moor-edge, and thence, by mighty, dim, air-drenched passages of earth and sky, to the horizons of the sea. A clear May noon illuminated the waste, and Dartmoor, soaking her fill of sunshine, ran over with it, so that Devon's self spread little darker of bosom than the grey and silver of high clouds lifted above her, mountainous under the sun.

Hills and plains were still mottled with the winter coat of the heather, and the verdure of the spearing grasses suffered diminution under a far-flung pallor of dead blades above breaking green; but the face of Dartmoor began to glow and the spring gorse leapt like a running flame along it. At water's brink was starry silver of crow-foot, and the heath, still darkling, sheltered sky-blue milk-wort and violet and the budding gold of the tormentil.

One white road ran due north-east and south-west across the desert, and round about it, like the tents of the Anakim, rose huge snowy hillocks and ridges silver-bright in the sun. Here the venerable Archæan granites of Dartmoor, that on Trowlesworthy blush to a ruddy splendour, and elsewhere break beautifully in fair colour and fine grain through the coarser porphyritic stone, suffer a change, and out of their perishing constituents emerges kaolin, or china clay.

A river met this naked road, and at their junction the

grey bridge of Cadworthy saddled Plym. Beyond, like the hogged back of a brown bear, Wigford Down rolled above the gorges of Dewerstone, and further yet, retreated fields and forests, great uplifted plains, and sudden elevations that glimmered along their crests with the tender green of distant larch and beech.

The atmosphere was opalescent, milky, sweet, as though earth's sap, leaping to the last tree-tip and bursting bud, exuded upon air the very visible incense and savour of life. Running water and lifting lark made the music of this hour; and at one spot on the desert a girl's voice mingled with them and enlarged the melody, for it was gentle and musical and belonged to the springtime.

She sat high on Trowlesworthy, where the rushes chatter and where, to their eternal treble, the wind strikes deep organ music from the forehead of the tor. From the clefts of the rocks around her, where foxes homed sometimes and the hawk made her nest, there hung now russet tassels and tufts of dead lady-fern; and above this rack of the old year sprang dark green aigrettes of the new.

Stonecrops and pennyworts also flourished amid the uncurling fronds; aloft, the heath and whortle made curls for the great tor's brow; below, to the girl's feet, there sloped up boulders that shone with fabric of golden-brown mosses and dappled lichens, jade-green and grey. The woodsorrel had climbed hither, and its frail bells and sparkling trefoils glittered on the earth.

The sun shone with a thready lustre over the million flattened dead rushes roundabout this place, and its light spread out upon them into a pool of pale gold. Thus a radiance as of water extended here and the wind, fretting all this death, heightened the deception; while the scattered rocks shone brilliantly against so much reflected light and looked like boulders half submerged at the fringe of a glittering sea.

The girl laughed and gazed down at her home. It was a squat grey building half-way between the red tor and the distant bridge. It stood amid bright green crofts, and beside it was a seemly hayrick and an unseemly patch of rufous light that stared — hideous as a blood-shot eye — from the harmonious textures of the waste. There a shippen under an iron roof sank to rusty dissolution.

Here was Trowlesworthy Farm and a great rabbit warren that extended round about it.

Milly Luscombe lived at Trowlesworthy with an uncle and aunt. She was accustomed to work very hard for her living, but for the moment she did not work. She only breathed the breath of spring and talked of love.

Beside her sat a sturdy youth with a red face and a little budding flaxen moustache. His countenance was not cast in a cheerful mould. Indeed, he frowned and gazed gloomily out of large grey eyes at the valley beneath him.

"I axed father in plain words if I might be tokened to you — of course, that was if you said 'yes' — and he answered as plainly that I might not. You see, he was terrible up in years afore he got married himself, and so he thinks a man's a fool to go into it young."

"How old was he then?"

"Forty-five to the day. And he's seventy next month, though he don't feel or look anything like so much. He's full of old, stale sayings about marrying in haste and repenting at leisure: and such like. So there it is, Milly."

The girl nodded. She was a dark maiden with brown eyes and a pretty mouth. She sniffed rather tearfully and wiped her eyes with the corner of her sun-bonnet.

"Belike your father only waited so long because the right one didn't come. When he found your mother, I'm sure he married her quick enough."

"No, he didn't. They was tokened when he was forty, and kept company for five years."

"That ban't loving," she said.

"Of course it ban't! And yet father isn't what you might call a hard man. Far from it, to all but me. A big-hearted, kindly creature and a good father, if he could only understand more. Like a boy in some things. I'm sure I feel a lot older than him sometimes. If 'twas Ned now, he'd be friendly and easy as you please."

"What does Mrs. Baskerville say?"

"She's on our side, and so's my sisters. Polly and May think the world of you. 'Tisn't as if I was like my brother Ned — a lazy chap that hates the sight of work. I stand to work same as father himself, and he knows that; and when there's anything calling to be done, 'tis always, 'Where be Rupert to?' But lazy as Ned is, he'd let him marry to-morrow."

"Mr. Baskerville's frighted of losing you from Cadworthy, Rupert."

The young man looked out where a wood rose south of the bridge, and his father's farm lifted its black chimneys above the trees.

"He tells me I'm his right hand; and yet refuses, though this is the first thing that ever I've asked him," he said.

"Wouldn't he suffer it if you promised him to do as he done, and not marry for five years?"

"I'll promise no such thing. Father seems to think 'tis all moonshine, but I shall have another go at him when he comes home next week. Till then I shan't see you no more, for I've promised myself to get through a mighty pile of work — just to astonish him."

"The harder you work, the more he'll want you to bide at home," she said. "Not that I mind you working. All the best sort work — I know that."

"I must work — no credit to me. I'm like father there. I ban't comfortable if I don't get through a good lump of work in the day."

She looked at him with large admiration.

"Where's Mr. Baskerville gone to?"

"To Bideford for the wrestlin' matches. He always stands stickler when there's a big wrestlin'. Such a famous man he was at it — champion of Devon for nine years. He retired after he was married. But now, just on his seventieth birthday, he's as clever as any of 'em. 'Twas his great trouble, I do believe, that neither me nor Ned ever shaped well at it. But we haven't got his weight. We take after my mother's people and be light built men — compared to father."

"Pity May weren't a boy," said Milly. "She's got weight enough."

"Yes," he admitted. "She's the very daps of father. She'll be a whacker when she grows up. 'Tis a nuisance for a woman being made so terrible beamy. But there 'tis — and a happier creature never had to walk slow up a hill."

Silence fell for a while between them.

"We must wait and hope," she declared at last. "I shan't change, Rupert — you know that."

"Right well I know it, and more shan't I."

"You're just turned twenty-three and I'm eighteen. After all, we've got plenty of time," said Milly.

"I hope so. But that's no reason why for we should waste it. 'Tis all wasted till I get you."

She put her hand out to him, and he caught it and held it.

"It might be a long sight worse," she said. "'Tis only a matter of patience."

"There's no need for patience, and there lies the cruelty. However, I'll push him hard when he comes

home. Tokened I will be to 'e — not in secret, but afore the nation."

"Look!" she said. "Two men riding up over. Go a bit further off, there's a dear."

Rupert looked where she pointed, and then he showed no little astonishment and concern.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "If' tisn't my Uncle Humphrey Baskerville; and Mark along with him. What the mischief sent them here, of all ways? Can't we hide?"

But no hiding-place offered. Therefore the young people rose and walked boldly forward.

"He's going out to Hen Tor to look at they ruins, I reckon," said Milly. "I met your cousin Mark a bit ago, and he told me his father was rather interested in that old rogues-roost of a place they call Hen Tor House. Why for I can't say; but that's where they be riding, I doubt."

Two men on ponies arrived as she spoke, and drew up beside the lovers.

The elder exhibited a cast of countenance somewhat remarkable. He was a thin, under-sized man with grey hair. His narrow, clean-shorn face sloped wedge-shaped to a pointed chin, and his mouth was lipless and very hard. Grotesquely large black eyebrows darkened his forehead, but they marked no arch. They were set in two patches or tufts, and moved freely up and down over a pair of rather dim grey eyes. The appearance of dimness, however, was not real, for Humphrey Baskerville possessed good sight. He was sixty-three years old, and a widower. He passed for a harsh, secretive man, and lived two miles from his elder brother, Vivian Baskerville, of Cadworthy. His household consisted of himself, his son Mark, and his housekeeper.

"Good morning, Uncle Humphrey," said Rupert,

taking the bull by the horns. "You know Milly Luscombe, don't you? Morning, Mark."

Mr. Baskerville's black tufts went up and his slit of a mouth elongated.

"What's this then?" he asked. "Fooling up here with a girl — you? I hope you're not taking after your good-for-nothing brother?"

"Needn't fear that, uncle."

"How's Mr. Luscombe?" asked the old man abruptly, turning to the girl.

Milly feared nobody — not even this much-feared and mysterious person — and now she turned to him and patted his old pony's neck as she answered —

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Baskerville, and I'm sure he'd hope you are the same."

The tufts came down and he looked closely at her.

"You playing truant too — eh? Well, why not? 'Tis too fine a day for work, perhaps."

"So it is, then. Even your old blind pony knows that."

"Only blind the near side," he answered. "He can see more with one eye than many humans can with both."

"What's his name, please?"

"I don't know. Never gave him one."

They walked a little way forward, while Rupert stopped behind and spoke to his cousin Mark.

"So you like that boy very much — eh?" said the old man drily and suddenly to Milly.

She coloured up and nodded.

"Nonsense and foolery!"

"If 'tis, I wouldn't exchange it for your sense, Mr. Baskerville."

He made a deep grunt, like a bear.

"That's the pert way childer speak to the old folk now — is it?"

"Even you was in love once?"

"Nonsense and foolery — nonsense and foolery!"

"Would you do different if you could go back?"

He did not answer the question.

"I doubt you're too good for Rupert Baskerville," he said.

"He's too good for me."

"He stands to work — I grant that. But he's young, and he's foolish, like all young things. Think better of it. Keep away from the young men. Work — work — work your fingers to the bone. That's the only wise way. I'm going to look at yonder ruin on the side of Hen Tor. I may build it up again and live there and die there."

"What! Leave Hawk House, Mr. Baskerville?"

"Why not? 'Tis too much in the world for me and Mark."

"'Tis the loneliest house in these parts."

"Too much in the world," he repeated.

"That's nonsense and foolery, if you like," she said calmly; "I'm sure love-making be all plain common-sense compared to that."

He pulled up and regarded her with a grim stare.

"I've found somebody to-day that isn't afraid of me, seemingly."

"Why for should I be?"

"For no reason, except that most others are. What do they all think? I'll tell you; they think I'm wrong here."

He tilted up his black wide-awake hat and tapped his forehead.

"Surely never! The folk only be frightened of your great wittiness — so I believe. Rupert always says that you are terrible clever."

"That shows he's a terrible fool. Don't you mate with a fool, Milly."

"I'll promise that anyway, sir."

She spoke with perfect self-possession and interested the old man. Then he found that he was interested, and turned upon himself impatiently and shouted to his son.

"Come on, boy! What are you dawdling there for?"

Mark instantly dug his heels into his pony and followed his father. He was a youthful edition of the elder, with a difference. Humphrey was ill-clad, and Mark was neat. Humphrey's voice was harsh and disagreeable; Mark's was soft and almost womanly. Mark also had a smooth face and heavy eyebrows; but his features were clearer cut, more delicate; his eyes were blue and beautiful. He had a manner somewhat timid and retiring. He was not a cringing man, but a native deference guided him in all dealings with his kind.

Before starting, Mr. Baskerville stopped, drew a letter from his pocket, and called to Rupert.

"Take this to my brother Vivian, will you? I was going to leave it on the way back, but I'll not waste his time."

The youth came forward and took the letter.

"Father's away to Bideford — standing stickler for the wrestlin'," he said.

"Good God! At his age! Can't an old man of seventy find nothing better and wiser to do than run after childish things like that?"

The son was silent, and his uncle, with a snort of deep disdain, rode forward.

"'Tis about the birthday," Rupert explained to Milly. "In June father will turn seventy, and there is to be a rare fuss made, and a spread, and all the family to come round him at Cadworthy. Of course, Uncle Nat will come. In fact, 'twas his idea that we

should have a celebration about it; but I doubt if Uncle Humphrey will. He'd think such a thing all rubbish, no doubt, for he's against every sort of merry-making. You see how he went just now when I told him father was gone to the wrestlin' matches."

"Don't you mind him too much, all the same," said Milly. "He looks terrible grim and says dreadful things, but I don't believe he's half in earnest. I ban't feared of him, and never will be. Don't you be neither."

They left the tor and proceeded to the girl's home beneath. The close-cropped turf of the warrens spread in a green and resilient carpet under their feet; and, flung in a mighty pattern upon it, young red leaves of whortleberry broke through and spattered the miles of turf with a haze of russet.

Rupert said farewell at the entrance; then he hastened homeward and presently reached his family circle as it was preparing to dine.

Hester Baskerville, the wife of Vivian, was a quiet, fair woman of fine bearing and above middle height. She was twenty years younger than her husband, but the union had been a happy and successful one in every respect, and the woman's mild nature and large patience had chimed well with the man's strong self-assertion, narrow outlook, and immovable opinions. Kindness of heart and generosity of spirit distinguished them both; and these precious traits were handed to the children of the marriage, six in number.

Ned Baskerville, the eldest son, was considered the least satisfactory and the best looking. Then came Rupert, a commonplace edition of Ned, but worth far more as a responsible being. These men resembled their mother and both lived at home. Young Nathan Baskerville followed. He was a sailor and seldom seen at Cadworthy. The two girls of this family

succeeded Nathan. May and Polly were like their father — of dark complexion and inclined to stoutness; while the baby of the household was Humphrey, a youngster of thirteen, called after the dreaded uncle.

All save Nat, the sailor, were at table when Rupert entered with his letter, and all showed keenest interest to learn whether Mr. Baskerville of Hawk House had accepted his invitation.

Rupert handed the letter to his mother, and she was about to put it aside until her husband's return; but her children persuaded her to open it.

"Such a terrible exciting thing, mother," said stout May. "Us never won't sleep a wink till us knows."

"I hope to the Lord he isn't coming," declared Ned. "'Twill spoil all — a regular death's head he'll be, and us shan't dare to have an extra drop of beer or a bit of fun after with the girls."

'Beer and a bit of fun with the girls' represented the limit of Edward Baskerville's ambitions; and he gratified them with determination when opportunity offered. His father was blind to his faults and set him on a pedestal above the rest of the family; but his mother felt concern that her eldest son should be so slight a man. She lived in hope that he might waken to his responsibilities and justify existence. Ned was unusually well-educated, and would do great things some day in his father's opinion; but the years passed, he was now twenty-five, and the only great thing that he had done was twice to become engaged to marry and twice to change his mind. None denied him a rare gift of good looks; and his fine figure, his curly hair, his twinkling eyes and his mouth, when it smiled, proved attractive to many maidens.

Mrs. Baskerville left a spoon in the large beef-steak pudding and read her brother-in-law's letter, while a cloud of steam ascended to the kitchen ceiling.

"DEAR BROTHER VIVIAN,

"You ask me to come and eat my dinner with you on the twenty-eighth day of June next, because on that day you will be up home seventy years old. If you think 'tis a fine thing to find yourself past three score and ten — well, perhaps it is. You can't go on much longer, anyway, and journey's end is no hardship. At a first thought I should have reckoned such a birthday wasn't much to rejoice over; but you're right and I'm wrong. A man may pride himself on getting so well through with the bulk of his life and reaching nigh the finish with so few thorns in his feet and aches in his heart as what you have. I'll come.

"Yours faithfully,

"HUMPHREY BASKERVILLE."

A mournful sound like the wind in the trees went up from Uncle Humphrey's nephews and nieces.

"Be damned to him!" said Ned.

"Perhaps he won't come after all, when he hears Uncle Nat is coming," suggested May. She was always hopeful.

Mrs. Baskerville turned and put the letter on the mantel-shelf behind an eight-day clock. Then she sat down and began to help the pudding.

"We must make him as welcome as we can, for father's sake," she said.

CHAPTER II

THE hamlet of Shaugh Prior, a gift to the monks of Plympton in time past, stands beneath Shaugh Moor at the edge of a mighty declivity. The Church of St. Edward lifts its battlemented tower and crocketed pinnacles above a world of waste and fallow. It is perched upon a ridge and stands, supported by trees and a few cottages, in a position of great prominence. The scant beauty that this holy place possessed has vanished under restoration; but there yet remain good bells, while a notable font-cover, cast forth by vanished vandals, is now returned to its use.

Round about the church dark sycamores shine in spring, and at autumn drop their patched and mottled foliage upon the dust of the dead. Broad-bosomed fields ascend to the south; easterly a high road climbs to the Moor, and immediately north of Shaugh the slopes of High Down lead by North Wood to Cadworthy Farm and Cadworthy Bridge beyond it.

From High Down the village and its outlying habitations may be perceived at a glance. The cots and homesteads converge and cluster in, with the church as the central point and heart of the organisation. Around it dwellers from afar are come to sleep through their eternal night, and a double row of slates, like an amulet, girdles the ancient fane. Here and there flash white marble in the string of grey above the graves of the people; and beside the churchyard wall stand heaped a pack of Time's playing cards — old, thin, and broken slates from graves

forgotten — slates and shattered slabs that have fallen away from the unremembered dust they chronicled, and now follow into oblivion the bones they marked.

A school, a rectory, 'The White Thorn' inn, and a dozen dwellings constitute Shaugh Prior, though the parish extends far beyond these boundaries; and on this spring day, one thrush warbling from a lilac bush at a cottage door, made music loud enough to fill the hamlet.

Undershaugh Farm stood near on the great hill that fell westerly to Shaugh Bridge, at watersmeet in the valley; and upon the land hard by it, two men tramped backward and forward, crossing and re-crossing in the bare centre of a field. They were working over sown mangold and enriching the seed under their feet by scattering upon it a fertile powder. The manure puffed from their hands in little golden clouds under the sunlight. The secret of this mixture belonged to one man, and none grew such mangolds as he could grow.

Undershaugh was the property of Nathan Baskerville, innkeeper, and he had let it for twenty years to a widow; but Mr. Baskerville took an active personal interest in the welfare of his property, and Mrs. Priscilla Lintern, his tenant, was very well pleased to follow his advice on all large questions of husbandry and rotation. As did the rest of the world, she knew his worth and wisdom.

Nathan Baskerville had original ideas, and these were a source of ceaseless and amicable argument between him and his elder brother, Vivian Baskerville, of Cadworthy. But Mr. Nathan's centre of activity and nidus, from which his enterprises and undertakings took shape and separate being, was 'The White Thorn' public-house. Here, at the centre of the little web of Shaugh Prior, he pursued his busy and prosperous life.

Nothing came amiss to him; nothing seemed to fail in his hands. He had a finger in fifty pies, and men followed his lead as a matter of course, for Nathan Baskerville was never known to make a bad bargain or faulty investment. Nor did he keep his good luck to himself. All men could win his ear; the humblest found him kind. He would invest a pound for a day labourer as willingly as ten for a farmer. After five-and-twenty years in Shaugh Prior he had won the absolute trust of his neighbours. All eyes brightened at his name. He was wont to say that only one living man neither believed in him nor trusted him.

"And that man, as luck will have it, is my own brother Humphrey," the innkeeper would confess over his bar to regular visitors thereat. "'Tis no great odds, however, and I don't feel it so much as you might think, because Humphrey Baskerville is built on a very uncomfortable pattern. If 'twas only me he mistrusted, I might feel hurt about it; but 'tis the world, and therefore I've got no right to mind. There's none — none he would rely upon in a fix — a terrible plight for a man that. But I live in hopes that I'll win him round yet."

The folk condoled with him, and felt a reasonable indignation that this most large-hearted, kindly, and transparent of spirits should rest under his own brother's suspicion. They explained it as the work of jealousy. All Baskervilles had brains, and most were noted for good looks; but both gifts had reached their highest development and culmination in Nathan. He was the handsomest and the cleverest of the clan; and doubtless Humphrey, a sinister and secret character, against whom much was whispered and more suspected, envied his brother's gifts and far-reaching popularity. Nathan was sixty, the youngest and physically the

weakest of the three brothers. He had a delicate throat which often caused him anxiety.

The men scattering manure upon the mangolds made an end of their work and separated. One took some sacks and the pails used for the fertiliser. Then he mounted a bare-backed horse that stood in a corner of the field, and rode away slowly to Undershaugh. His companion crossed the stream beneath the village, mounted a hill beyond it, and presently entered 'The White Thorn.' He was a well-turned, fair, good-looking youth in corduroys and black leathern leggings. He wore no collar, but his blue cotton shirt was clean and made a pleasant contrast of colour with the brown throat that rose from it. Young Lintern was the widow Lintern's only son and her right hand at Undershaugh.

The men in the bar gave him good day, and Mr. Baskerville, who was serving, drew for him half a pint of beer.

"Well, Heathman," he said. "So that's done. And, mark me, 'twas worth the doing. If you don't fetch home first prize as usual for they mangolds, say I've forgot the recipe."

"'Tis queer stuff," answered the youngster, "and what with this wind blowing, my eyes and nose and throat's all full of it."

"'Twill do you no harm but rise a pleasant thirst."

Mr. Baskerville had humour stamped at the wrinkled corners of his bright eyes. His face was genial and rubicund. He wore a heavy grey beard, but his hair, though streaked with grey, was still dark in colour. A plastic mouth that widened into laughter a thousand times a day, belonged to him. He was rather above average height, sturdy and energetic. He declared that he had never known what it was to

be weary in mind or body. Behind his bar he wore no coat, but ministered in turned-up shirt sleeves that revealed fine hairy arms.

Young Ned Baskerville sat in the bar, and now he spoke to Heathman Lintern.

"Have one with me, Heathman," he said. "I was going down to your mother with a message, but now you can take it and save me the trouble."

His uncle shook his head.

"Ah, boy — always the same with you. Anybody as will save you trouble be your friend. 'Tis a very poor look-out, Ned; for let a certain party only get wind of it that you're such a chap for running from work, and he'll mighty soon come along and save you all trouble for evermore."

"And who might he be, Uncle Nat?"

"Old Nick, my fine fellow! You may laugh, but Tommy Gollop here will bear me out, and Joe Voysey too, won't you, Joe? They be both born and bred in the shadow of the church, and as well up in morals as grave-digging and cabbage-growing. And they'll tell you that the devil's always ready to work for an idle man."

"True," said Mr. Gollop. "True as truth itself. But the dowl won't work for nought, any more than the best of us. Long hours, I grant you — never tired him, and never takes a rest — but he'll have his wages; and Ned here knows what they be, no doubt."

Ned laughed.

"I'm all right," he said. "I shall work hard enough come presently, when it gets to be worth while."

Mr. Gollop spoke again. He was a stout man with a little grey beard, a flat forehead, barely indicated under his low-growing, coarse hair, and large brown, solemn eyes. He and his sister were leading figures at Shaugh Prior, and took themselves and their mani-

fold labours in a serious spirit. Some self-complacency marked their outlook; and their perspective was faulty. They held Shaugh Prior as the centre of civilisation, and considered that their united labours had served to place and helped to maintain it in that position. Thomas Gollop was parish clerk and sexton; his sister united many avocations. She acted as pew-opener at the church; she was a sick-nurse and mid-wife; she took temporary appointments as plain cook; she posed as intelligencer of Shaugh Prior; and what she did not know of every man, woman, and child in the village, together with their ambitions, financial position, private relations, religious opinions, and physical constitutions, was not worth knowing.

"At times of large change like this, when we are threatened with all manner of doubts and dangers, 'tis well for every man among us to hold stoutly to religion and defy any one who would shake us," said Mr. Gollop. "For my part I shall strike the first blow, and let it be seen that I'm a man very jealous for the Lord, and the village and the old paths."

"What's going to happen?" asked Ned. "You talk as if Doomsday was coming."

"Not at all," answered Mr. Gollop. "When Doomsday comes, if I'm still here, I shall know how to handle it; but 'tis the new vicar. A man is a man; and with a strange man 'tis only too terrible certain there will creep in strange opinions and a nasty hunger for novelty."

"And what's worse," said Mr. Voysey, "a young man. An old man I could have faced from my sixty-five years without fear; but how can you expect a young youth — full of the fiery silliness of the twenties — to understand that as I've been gardener at the vicarage for forty year, so in right and decency and order I ought to go on being gardener there?"

"Have no fear, Joe," said Mr. Baskerville. "If there's one thing among us that Mr. Masterman won't change, 'tis you, I'm sure; for who knows the outs and ins of the garden up the hill like you do?"

"'Tis true," admitted Tommy Gollop. "That land is like a human, you might say — stiff and stubborn and got to be coaxed to do its best; and I'm sure he'll very soon see that only Voysey can fetch his beans and peas out of the soil, and that it's took him a lifetime to learn the trick of the place. And I feel the same to the church. If he's got any new-fangled fashion of worship, Shaugh will rise against him like one man. After fifty-two years of the Reverend Valletort, we can't be blown from our fixed ways at a young man's breath; and I'm sure I do hope that he won't want so much as a cobweb swept down, or else there'll be difficulties spring up around him like weeds after rain."

"What a pack of mouldy old fossils you are in this place!" said Heathman Lintern. "I'm sure, for my part, I hope the man will fetch along a few new ideas to waken us up. If 'twasn't for Mr. Baskerville here, Shaugh would be forgot in the world altogether. You should hear Jack Head on the subject."

But Tommy Gollop little liked such criticism.

"You're young and terribly ignorant, and Jack Head's a red radical as ought to be locked up," he answered. "But you'll do well to keep your ignorance from leaking out and making you look a ninny-hammer afore sensible men. Shaugh Prior's a bit ahead of the times rather than behind 'em, and my fear always is, and always will be, that we shall take the bit in our teeth some day and bolt with it. 'Tis no good being too far ahead of the race; and that's why I'm afeared that this young Masterman, when he finds how forward we are, will try to go one better and stir up strife."

"Don't think it, Tommy," said Nathan Baskerville. "I've had a good tell with him and find him a very civil-spoken and well-meaning man. No fool, neither. You mustn't expect him to leave everything just as Mr. Valletort left it. You must allow for the difference between eighty-two and twenty-eight, which is Mr. Masterman's age; but, believe me, he's calm and sensible and very anxious to please. He's pleased me by praising my beer, like one who knew; and he's pleased my brother Vivian by praising his riding-cob, like one who knew; and he'll please Joe Voysey presently by praising the vicarage garden; and he'll please you, Thomas, by praising your churchyard."

"If he's going to be all things to all men, he'll please none," said Tommy. "We've got no need of one of them easy ministers. Him and me must keep the whip-hand of Shaugh, same as me and the Reverend Valletort used to do. However, the man will hear my views, and my sister's also; because a clear understanding from the start be going to save a world of worry after."

"Not married," said Mr. Voysey. "But he've a sister. I hope she ban't one of they gardening sort, so-called, that's always messing round making work and finding things blowed down here or eaten with varmints there. If she's a flower-liking female, 'twill be my place to tell her straight out from the shoulder that flowers won't grow in the vicarage garden, and that she must be content with the 'dendrums in summer time and the foxgloves and such-like homely old stuff."

"He was a football player to college and very skilled at it, so Barker told me," said Ned Baskerville.

"Then mark me, he'll be for making a club, and teaching the young chaps to play of a Saturday and keeping 'em out of your bar, Mr. Baskerville," de-

clared the parish clerk; "Yes, look at it as you will, there's changes in the air, and I hope we'll all stand shoulder to shoulder against 'em, and down the man afore he gets his foot in the stirrup."

"You two — Joe Voysey and you — be enough to frighten the poor soul out of his seven senses afore he's been in the place a week," declared Ned Baskerville. "And I hope for one that Uncle Nat won't go against him; and I know father won't, for he's said this many a day that old Valletort was past his work and ought to be pensioned off."

"Your father's not a man for unseemly changes, all the same," declared Tommy; "and if this new young minister was to go in the pulpit in white instead of black, for instance, as the Popish habit is, Vivian Baskerville would be the first to rise up and tell him to dress himself decently and in order."

But Ned denied this.

"Don't you think you know my father, Tommy, because you don't. If this chap gets up a football club, he'll have father on his side from the first; and he can preach in black or white or pea-green, so long as he talks sense through his mouth, and not nonsense through his nose, like the old one did."

"Don't you speak for your father," said Joseph Voysey. He was a very tall and a very thin man, with pale, watery eyes and a scanty beard. Nature had done so much for his long and rather absurd hatchet nose, that there was no material left for his chin.

"If I shouldn't talk for my father, who should?" retorted Ned. Then Mr. Voysey descended to personalities and accused the other of irreverence and laziness. The argument grew sharp and Mr. Baskerville was forced to still it.

"Come you along and don't talk twaddle, Ned," he

said to his nephew. "I'm going down to Undershaugh myself this minute, to see Mrs. Lintern, and you and Heathman will come with me."

He called to a pot-boy, turned down his sleeves, took his coat from a hook behind the door, and was ready to start.

"When Mr. Masterman does come among us, 'twill be everybody's joy and pride to make him welcome in a kindly spirit," he said. "Changes must happen, but if he's a gentleman and a sportsman and a Christian —all of which he certainly looks to be — then 'twill be the fault of Shaugh Prior, and not the man's, if all don't go friendly and suent. Give and take's the motto."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Gollop. "Give nought and take all: that's the way of the young nowadays; and that'll be his way so like as not; and I'll deny him to his face from the first minute, if he seeks to ride roughshod over me, and the church, and the people."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Mr. Voysey.

"We'll hope he'll have enough sense to spare a little for you silly old blids," said Heathman Lintern. Then he followed the Baskervilles.

CHAPTER III

NATHAN BASKERVILLE, like his brother Humphrey, was a widower. Very early in life he had married a young woman of good means and social position superior to his own. His handsome face and manifold charms of disposition won Minnie Stanlake, and she brought to him a small fortune in her own right, together with the detestation of her whole family. Husband and wife had lived happily, save for the woman's fierce and undying jealousy which extended beyond her early grave.

She died childless at eight-and-twenty, and left five thousand pounds to her husband on the understanding that he did not marry again. He obeyed this condition, though it was vain in law, and presently returned to his own people. His married life was spent at Taunton, as a general dealer, but upon his wife's death he abandoned this business and set up another like it at Bath.

At five-and-thirty years of age he came back to Devonshire and his native village. Great natural energy kept him busy. He dearly liked to conduct all manner of pettifogging business, and his good nature was such that the folk did not hesitate to consult him upon their affairs. His legal attainments were considered profound, while his shrewd handling of figures, and his personal prosperity, combined to place him on a pinnacle among the folk as a great financier and most capable man of business. He did not lend money at interest, but was known more than once to have helped a lame dog over a stile. Many kind things he did, and no man spoke a bad word of him.

People brought him their savings and begged him to invest them according to his judgment. They usually asked for no details, but received their interest regularly, and trusted Nathan Baskerville like the Bank of England. He was in truth a large-hearted and kindly spirit, who found his pleasure in the affection and also in the applause of the people. He liked to figure among them as the first. He loved work for itself and enjoyed the universal praise of his attainments.

Mr. Gollop might delude himself into believing that he was the leading citizen of Shaugh; but the master of 'The White Thorn' knew better. Without undue vanity he was not able to hide the fact that he stood above others in the esteem of the countryside. He was not so rich as people thought, and he had not laid foundations of such a fortune as they supposed during the years at Bath; but he fostered the impression and the fame it gave him. It suited better his native idiosyncrasy to tower among smaller men, than to be small amidst his betters. He liked the round-eyed reverence of ploughboys and the curtsey of the school children.

The late vicar, a Tory of the early Victorian age, had contrived to let Mr. Baskerville perceive the gulf that existed between them; and that the more definitely because Nathan was a Nonconformist. The publican professed strong Conservative principles, however, and the attitude of the last incumbent of Shaugh had caused him some secret annoyance; but he too hoped that with the advent of a younger man and modern principles this slight disability might vanish. For the rest he rode to hounds, and his attitude in the hunting field was admitted to be exceedingly correct and tactful.

He had no known confidant and he seldom spoke

about himself. That he had never married astonished many people exceedingly; but it was significant of the genuine affection and esteem entertained for him that none, even when they came to learn of his dead wife's bequest and its condition, ever imputed sordid motives to his celibacy. Five thousand pounds was guessed to be but a small part of Mr. Baskerville's fortune, and, when the matter chanced upon local tongues, men and women alike were quite content to believe that not affection for money, but love for his dead partner, had proved strong enough to maintain Nathan in widowhood. He liked the company of women, and was never so pleased as when doing them a service. For their part they admired him also and wished him well.

Mr. Baskerville not only owned 'The White Thorn' and its adjacencies, but had other house property at Shaugh and in the neighbouring parish of Bickleigh. His principal possession was the large farm of Undershaugh; and thither now he proceeded with his nephew, Ned Baskerville, on one side of him and young Heathman Lintern on the other.

According to his wont Nathan chattered volubly and suited the conversation to his listeners.

"You young chaps must both join the football club, if there is one. I'm glad to think new parson's that sort, for 'tis just the kind of thing we're wanting here. You fellows, and a lot like you, spend too much time and money at my bar to please me. You may laugh, Ned, but 'tis so. And another thing I'd have you to know: so like as not we shall have a rifle corps also. I've often turned my mind on it. We must let this man see we're not all willingly behind the times, but only waiting for a bit of encouragement to go ahead with the best."

Ned pictured his own fine figure in a uniform, and

applauded the rifle corps; and Heathman did the like.

"Ned here would fancy himself a lot in that black and silver toggery the yeomanry wear, wouldn't you, Ned?"

"'Tis a very good idea, and would help to make you and a few other round-backed chaps as straight in the shoulders as me," declared Ned complacently.

"Well, you may be straight," answered the other with a laugh. "Certainly you've never been known yet to bend your shoulders to work. A day's trout-fishing be the hardest job that ever you've taken on — unless courting the maidens be a hard job."

Ned laughed and so did his uncle.

"You're right there, Heathman," declared Mr. Baskerville. "A lazy scamp you are, Ned, though your father won't see it; but nobody knows it better than the girls. They like you very well for a fine day and a picnic by the river; but I can tell you this: they're getting to see through you only too well. They don't want fair-weather husbands; but stout, hard fellows, like Heathman here, as have got brains and use 'em, and arms and legs and use 'em."

"No more use — you, than a pink and white china joney stuck on a mantelshelf," said Heathman. Whereupon Ned dashed at him and, half in jest, half in earnest, they wrestled by the roadside. Mr. Baskerville looked on with great enjoyment, and helped presently to dust Heathman after he had been cross-buttocked.

"That'll show 'e if I'm a pink and white puppet for a mantelpiece," declared Ned.

The other laughed and licked a scratch on his hand.

"Well done you!" he said. "Never thought you was so spry. But let's have a whole day's ploughing

over a bit of the five-acre field to Undershaugh, and see what sort of a man you are in the evening."

"Not me," answered the other. "Got no use for the plough-tail myself. Rupert will take you on at that."

"To see you wrestle puts me in mind of your father," said Nathan. "This generation can't call home his greatness, and beside him you're a shrimp to a lobster, Ned; but 'twas a grand sight to see him handle a man in his prime. I mind actually getting him up to London once, because I named his name there among some sporting fellows and 'twas slighted. They thought, being my brother, that I held him too high, though he was champion of Devon at the time. But my way is never to say nought with my tongue that I won't back with my pocket, and I made a match for thirty pounds a side for your father. A Middlesex man called Thorpe, from down Bermondsey way, was chosen, and your father came up on a Friday and put that chap on his back twice in five minutes, and then went home again fifteen pound to the good. A very clever man too, was Thorpe, but he never wanted to have no more to do with your father. Vivian weighed over fourteen stone in them days, and not a pound of fat in the lot, I believe. He could have throwed down a tor, I reckon, if he could have got a hold on it. But you fellows be after your mother's build. The best of you — him that's at sea — won't never draw the beam to twelve stone."

A tramp stopped Mr. Baskerville, touched his hat and spoke.

"You gave me a bit of work harvesting two year ago, master, and you didn't pull much of a long face when I told you I wasn't fond of work as a rule. I'm more broke than usual just for the minute, and rather short o' boot-leather. Can 'e give me a job?"

Nathan was famous at making work for everybody,

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and loafers rarely appealed to him in vain. How such an exceedingly busy man could find it in his heart to sympathise with drones, none knew. It was another of the anomalies of Mr. Baskerville's character. But he often proved good for a square meal, a day's labour and a night's rest, as many houseless folk well knew.

"You're the joker who calls himself the 'Duke of Drake's Island,' aren't you?"

"The Duke of Drake's Island" grinned and nodded. He was a worthless soul, very well known to the Devon constabulary.

"Get up to the village and call at 'The White Thorn' in an hour from now, and ask for me."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Baskerville."

"We'll see about that later. I can find a job for you to-night; but it ain't picking primroses."

Priscilla Lintern met her landlord at the gate of Undershaugh. They were on terms of intimacy, and nodded to each other in an easy and friendly manner. She had been feeding poultry from a basin, and now set it down, wiped her fingers on her apron, and shook hands with Ned Baskerville.

"How be you, then? 'Tis a longful time since you called on us, Master Ned."

"I'm clever, thank you; and I see you are, Mrs. Lintern. And I hope Cora and Phyllis be all right too. Heathman here be growing as strong as a lion — ban't you, Heathman?"

Mrs. Lintern was a brown, good-looking woman of rather more than fifty. For twenty years she had farmed Undershaugh, and her power of reserve surprised a garrulous village. It was taken by the sensible for wisdom and by the foolish for pride. She worked hard, paid her rent at the hour it was due, as Nathan often mentioned to her credit, and kept her own counsel. Very little was known about her, save

that she had come to Shaugh as a widow with three young children, that she was kind-hearted and might have married Mr. Gollop a year after her arrival, but had declined the honour.

Her daughters were at dinner when the men entered, and both rose and saluted Ned with some self-consciousness. Phyllis, the younger, was like her mother: brown, neat, silent and reserved; the elder was cast in a larger mould and might have been called frankly beautiful.

Cora was dark, with black eyes and a fair skin whose purity she took pains to preserve. She was tall, straight and full in the bosom. Her mouth alone betrayed her, for the lips set close and they were rather thin; but people forgot them when she laughed and showed her pretty teeth. Her laugh again belied her lips, for it was gentle and pleasant. She had few delusions for a maiden, and she worked hard. To Cora belonged a gift of commonsense. The girl lacked sentiment, but she was shrewd and capable. She kept her mother's books and displayed a talent for figures. It was said that she had the brains of the family. Only Mr. Baskerville himself doubted it, and maintained that Cora's mother was the abler woman. Phyllis was lost at all times in admiration of her more brilliant sister, but Heathman did not like Cora and often quarrelled with her.

Ned gave his message and asked for a drink of cider. Thereupon Phyllis rose from her dinner and went to fetch it. But young Baskerville's eyes were on Cora while he drank. He had the manner of a man very well accustomed to female society, and long experience had taught him that nine girls out of ten found him exceedingly attractive. His easy insolence won them against their will. Such girls as demanded worship and respect found Ned not so agreeable; but those who preferred the male creature to dominate were fascinated by his

sublimity and affectation of knowledge and worldly wisdom. He pretended to know everything — a convincing attitude only among those who know nothing.

The talk was of a revel presently to take place at Tavistock. "And what's your gown going to be, Phyllis?" asked Ned.

The gown of Phyllis did not interest him in the least, but this question was put as a preliminary to another, and when the younger sister told him that she meant to wear plum-colour, he turned to Cora.

"Cora's got a lovely frock — blue muslin wi' little pink roses, and a straw hat wi' big pink roses," said Phyllis.

Ned nodded.

"I'd go a long way to see her in such a beautiful dress," he said; "and, mind, I'm to have a dance or two with you both. There's to be dancing in the evening — not rough and tumble on the grass, but boards are to be laid down and everything done proper."

They chattered about the promised festivity, while Nathan and Mrs. Lintern, having discussed certain farm matters, spoke of another and a nearer celebration.

"You see, my brother Vivian and I are of the good old-fashioned sort, and we're bent on the whole family meeting at a square feed, with good wishes all round, on his seventieth birthday. To think of him turned seventy! I can't believe it. Yet Time won't stand still — not even with the busiest. A family affair 'tis to be, and none asked outside ourselves."

"Does Mr. Humphrey go? He's not much of a hand at a revel."

"He is not; and I thought that he would have refused the invitation. But he's accepted. We shall try our hardest to cheer him up and get a drop of generous

liquor into him. I only hope he won't be a damper and spoil the fun."

"A pity he's going."

"We shall know that better afterwards. 'Twill be a pity if he mars all; but 'twill be a good thing if we overmaster him amongst us, and get him to take a hopefuller view of life and a kinder view of his fellow-creatures."

Ned chimed in.

"You'll never do that, Uncle Nat. He's too old to change now. And Cousin Mark be going just the same way. He's getting such a silent, hang-dog chap, and no wonder, having to live with such a father. I'd run away if I was him."

Nathan laughed.

"I believe you'd almost rather work than keep along with your Uncle Humphrey," he said.

"'Tis pretty well known I can work when I choose," declared Ned.

"Yes," said Heathman, with his mouth full; "and 'tis also pretty well known you never do choose."

The elder Baskerville clapped his hands.

"One to you, Heathman!" he said. "Ned can't deny the truth of that."

But Ned showed no concern.

"I shall make up for lost time very easily when I do start," he said. "I've got ideas, I believe, and they go beyond ploughing. I'm like Cora here — all brains. You may laugh, Uncle Nat, but you're not the only Baskerville with a head on your shoulders. I'll astonish you yet."

"You will — you will — the day you begin to work, Ned; and the sooner the better. I shall be very glad when it happens."

The women laughed, and Cora much admired Ned's lofty attitude. She too had ambitions, and felt little sympathy with those who were content to labour on

the soil. She strove often to fire her brother and enlarge his ambitions; but he had the farmer's instinct, enjoyed physical work, and laughed at her airs and graces.

"Give me Rupert," said Heathman now. "He's like me — not much good at talking and ain't got no use for the girls, but a towser to work."

"The man who ain't got no use for the girls is not a man," declared Ned very positively. "They're the salt of the earth — ban't they, Mrs. Lintern?"

She smiled and looked at him curiously, then at his uncle; but she did not answer.

"Anyway," continued Ned, "you're out when you say Rupert's like you; for hard worker that he is, he's found time for a bit of love-making."

Cora and Phyllis manifested instant excitement and interest at this news.

"Who is she? You must tell us," said the elder.

"Why, I will; but say nought, for nothing be known about it outside the families, and Rupert haven't said a word himself to me. I reckon he don't guess that I know. But such things can't be hid from my eyes — too sharp for that, I believe. 'Tis Milly Luscombe, if you must know. A very nice little thing too in her way. Not my sort — a bit too independent. I like a girl to feel a man's the oak to her ivy, but ——"

Uproarious laughter from his uncle cut Ned short.

"Mighty fine oak for a girl's ivy — you!" he said.

"You wait," repeated the younger. "Anyway, Rupert be sweet on Milly, and father knows all about it, and won't hear of it. So there's thunder in the air for the moment."

They discussed this interesting private news, but promised Ned not to retail it in any ear. Then he left them and, with Nathan, returned to the village.

Ned, undeterred by Mr. Baskerville's raillery, began loudly to praise Cora as soon as they had passed beyond earshot of the farmhouse-door.

"By Jove, she's a bowerly maiden and no mistake! Not her like this side of Plymouth, I do believe. Haven't seen her for a month of Sundays, and she's come on amazing."

"She's a very handsome girl without a doubt," admitted Nathan. "And a very clever girl too; but a word in your ear, my young shaver: you mustn't look that way once and for all."

"Why not, if I choose? I'm a free man."

"You may be — now — more shame to you. But Cora — well, your cousin Mark be first in the field there. A word to the wise is enough. You'll be doing a very improper thing if you look in that quarter, and I must firmly beg you won't, for everybody's sake."

"Mark!"

"Mark. And a very good chap he is — worth fifty of you."

"Mark!" repeated Ned, as though the notion was unthinkable. "I should have guessed that he would rather have run out of the country than lift his eyes to a girl!"

CHAPTER IV

THE Reverend Dennis Masterman was a bachelor. He came to Shaugh full of physical energy and certain hazy resolutions to accomplish notable work among a neglected people. His scholastic career was nugatory, and his intellect had offered no bar to his profession. He was physically brave, morally infirm. Therefore his sister, Alice Masterman, came to support him and share his lot and complement his character. She might indeed fly from cows, but she would not fly from parochial opposition. She was strong where he was weak. They were young, sanguine, and of gentle birth. They enjoyed private means, but were filled with wholesome ardour to justify existence and leave the world better than they found it. Dennis Masterman possessed interest, and regarded this, his first cure, as a stepping-stone to better things.

Shaugh Prior was too small for his natural energies and powers of endurance — so he told his sister; but she said that the experience would be helpful. She also suspected that reform might not be a matter of energy alone.

One evening, a week after their arrival, they were planning the campaign and estimating the value of lay helpers, when two important visitors were announced. A maiden appeared and informed the clergyman that Thomas Gollop and Eliza Gollop desired to see him.

"Show them into the common room," said he; then he twisted a little bronze cross that he wore at his watchchain and regarded Miss Masterman.

"The parish clerk and his sister — I wonder if you'd mind, Alice?" he asked.

For answer she put down her work.

"Certainly. Since you saw Joe Voysey alone and, not only engaged him, but promised he might have a boy for the weeding, I feel — well, you are a great deal too easy, Dennis. Gollop is a very masterful person, clearly, and his sister, so I am told, is just the same. You certainly must not see women alone. They'll get everything they want out of you."

"Of course, one wishes to strike a genial note," he explained. "First impressions count for such a lot with common people."

"Be genial by all means; I say nothing against that."

"Let's tackle them, then. Gollop's a tremendous Conservative, but we must get Liberal ideas into him, if we can — in reason."

Dennis Masterman was tall, square-shouldered and clean-shaven. He regarded himself as somewhat advanced, but had no intention of sowing his opinions upon the parish before the soil was prepared. He considered his character to be large-minded, tolerant, and sane; and for a man of eight-and-twenty he enjoyed fair measure of these virtues.

His sister was plain, angular, and four years older than Dennis. She wore double eyeglasses and had a gruff voice and a perceptible beard.

The Gollops rose as the vicar and his sister appeared. Miss Gollop was shorter and stouter than her brother, but resembled him.

"Good evening, your reverence; good evening, miss," said the parish clerk. "This is my sister, Miss Eliza. For faith, hope, and charity she standeth. In fact, a leading light among us, though I say it as should not."

Mr. Masterman shook hands with the woman; his sister bowed only.

"And what does Miss Gollop do?" asked Dennis.

"'Twould be easier to say what she don't do," answered Thomas. "She's butt-woman to begin with, or as you would call it, 'pew-opener.' Then she's sick-nurse to the parish, and she's midwife, and, when free, she'll do chores or cook for them as want her. And she's got a knowledge and understanding of the people round these parts as won't be beaten. She was Mr. Valletort's right hand, wasn't you, Eliza?"

"So he said," answered Miss Gollop. She was not self-conscious, but bore herself as Fame's familiar and one accustomed to admiration. She had estimated the force of the clergyman's character from his first sermon, and judged that her brother would be a match for him. Now she covertly regarded Miss Masterman, and perceived that here must lie any issue of battle that might arise.

"Do you abide along with your brother, miss, or be you just settling him into the vicarage?" she asked.

"I live with him."

Miss Gollop inclined her head.

"And I'm sure I hope, if I can serve you any way at any time, as you'll let me know."

"Thank you. Everybody can serve us: we want help from one and all," said Mr. Masterman.

"Ezacally so!" said Thomas. "And you must larn each man's value from those that know it — not by bitter experience. Likewise with the women. My sister can tell you, to threepence a day, what any female in this parish be good for; and as to the men, you'll do very well to come to me. I know 'em all — old and young — and their characters and their points — good and bad, crooked and odd. For we've got some originals among us, and I'm not going to deny it, haven't us, Eliza?"

"Every place have," she said.

"Might we sit down?" asked the man. "We'm of the bungy breed, as you see, and not so clever in our breathing as we could wish. But we'm here to go through the whole law and the prophets, so to speak, and we can do it better sitting."

"Please sit down," answered Dennis. Then he looked at his watch. "I can give you an hour," he said. "But I'm going to ride over to Bickleigh at nine o'clock, to see the vicar there."

"And a very nice gentleman you'll find him," declared Thomas. "Of course, Bickleigh be but a little matter beside Shaugh Prior. We bulk a good deal larger in the eyes of the nation, and can hold our heads so much the higher in consequence; but the Reverend Coaker is a very good, humble-minded man, and knows his place in a way that's a high example to the younger clergymen."

Miss Masterman cleared her throat, but her voice was none the less gruff.

"Perhaps you will now tell us what you have come for. We are busy people," she said.

Her brother deprecated this brevity and tried to tone it down, but Thomas accepted the lady's statement with great urbanity.

"Miss be right," he answered. "Busy as bees, I warrant — same as me and my own sister here. She don't wear out many chairs, do you, Eliza?"

"Not many," said Miss Gollop. "I always say, 'Let's run about in this world; plenty of time to sit down in the next.'"

"I may tell you," added Thomas kindly, "that your first sermon went down very suent. From where I sits, along by the font, I can get a good look across the faces, and the important people, the Baskervilles and the Lillicraps and the Luscombes and the Mum-

fords — one and all listened to every word, and nodded now and again. You'll be glad to know that."

"Some thought 'twas a sermon they'd heard afore, however," said Miss Gollop; "but no doubt they was wrong."

"Quite wrong," declared Dennis warmly. "It was a sermon written only the night before I preached it. And talking of the font——"

"Yes, of course, you've marked the famous font-cover over the holy basin, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Gollop. "'Tis the joy and pride of the church-town, I assure you. Not another like it in the world, they say. Learned men come all across England to see it — as well they may."

The famous font-cover, with its eight little snub-nosed saints and the Abbot elevated in the midst, was a special glory of St. Edward's.

"I meant to speak of that," said the clergyman. "The figure at the top has got more than his proper vestments on, Gollop. In fact, he's wrapped up in cobwebs. That is not worthy of us. Please see they are cleaned off."

"I hadn't noticed them; but since you say so — I'll look to it myself. Where the vamp-dish be concerned I allow none to meddle. It shall be done; but I must say again that I haven't noticed any cobwebs — not last Sunday. Have you, Eliza?" said Thomas.

"No, I have not," answered his sister.

"The dirt has clearly been there for months," remarked Miss Masterman.

There was a painful pause, during which Miss Gollop gazed at the vicar's sister and then at the vicar.

"'Tis a well-known fact that spiders will spin," she said vaguely, but not without intention. The other woman ignored her and turned to Thomas.

"Will you be so good as to proceed?"

"Yes, and gladly, miss," he answered. "And I'll begin with the Gollops, since they've done as much for this parish as anybody, living or dead. My father was parish clerk afore me, and a very remarkable man, wasn't he, Eliza?"

"He was."

"A remarkable man with a large faith in the power of prayer, was father. You don't see such faith now, worse luck. But he believed more than even I hold to, or my sister, either. You might say that he wasn't right always; but none ever dared to doubt the high religious quality of the man. But there he was — a pillar of the Church and State, as they say. He used to help his money a bit by the power of prayer; and they fetched childer sick of the thrush to him; and he'd tak 'em up the church tower and hold 'em over the battlements, north, south, east, and west — while he said the Lord's Prayer four times. He'd get a shilling by it every time, and was known to do twenty of 'em in a good year, though I never heard 'twas a very quick cure. But faith moves mountains, and he may have done more good than appeared to human eyes. And then in his age, he very near let a heavy babby drop over into the churchyard — just grabbed hold of un by a miracle and saved un. So that proper terrified the old man, and he never done another for fear of some lasting misfortune. Not but what a few devilish-natured people said that if 'twas knowed he let the childer fall now and again, he'd brisk up his business a hundred per centum. Which shows the evil-mindedness of human nature."

"I'll have no gross superstition of that sort here," said Mr. Masterman firmly.

"No more won't I," answered Thomas. "'Other times, other manners,' as the saying is. Have no fear. The church is very safe with me and Eliza for watch-dogs. Well, so much for my father. There

was only us two, and we never married — too busy for that. And we've done no little for Shaugh Prior, as will be better told you in good time by other mouths than ours."

He stopped to take breath, and Miss Masterman spoke.

"My brother will tell you that with regard to parish clerks the times are altering too," she said.

"And don't I know it?" he answered. "Why, good powers, you can't get a clerk for love or money nowadays! They'm regular dying out. 'He'll be thankful he've got one of the good old sort,' I said to my sister. 'For he'd have had to look beyond Dartymoor for such another as me.' And so he would."

"That's true," declared Miss Gollop.

"I mean that the congregation takes the place of the clerk in most modern services," continued Miss Masterman. "In point of fact, we shall not want exactly what you understand by a 'clerk.' 'Other times, other manners,' as you very wisely remarked just now."

Mr. Gollop stared.

"Not want a clerk!" he said. "Woman alive, you must be daft!"

"I believe not," answered Miss Masterman. "However, what my brother has got to say regarding his intentions can come later. For the present he will hear you."

"If you don't want a clerk, I've done," answered Mr. Gollop blankly. "But I'll make bold to think you can't ezacally mean that. Us'll leave it, and I'll tell my tale about the people. The Lillicraps be a harmless folk, and humble and fertile as coneys. You'll have no trouble along with them. The Baskervilles be valuable and powerful; and Mr. Hum-

phrey and his son is Church, and Mr. Vivian and his family is Church also, and his darters sing in the choir."

"We shall manage without women in the choir," said Miss Masterman.

"You may think so, but I doubt it," answered Eliza Gollop almost fiercely. "You'll have to manage without anybody in the church also, if you be for up-turning the whole order of divine service!" She was excited, and her large bosom heaved.

"Not up-turning — not up-turning," declared the clergyman. "Call it reorganisation. Frankly, I propose a surpliced choir. I have the bishop's permission; he wishes it. Now, go on."

"Then the Lord help you," said Thomas. "We'd better be going, Eliza. We've heard almost enough for one evening."

"Be reasonable," urged Miss Masterman with admirable self-command. "We are here to do our duty. We hope and expect to be helped by all sensible people — not hindered. Let Mr. Gollop tell us what he came to tell us."

"Well — as to reason — I ask no more, but where is it?" murmured Thomas. "'Twas the Baskervilles," he continued, wiping his forehead. "The other of 'em — Nathan — be unfortunately a chapel member; and if you be going to play these here May games in the House of the Lord, I'm very much afeared he'll draw a good few after him. They won't stand it — mark me."

"Where do the people at Undershaugh worship? I did not see Mrs. Lintern and her family last Sunday."

"They'm all chapel too."

Mr. Masterman nodded.

"Thank you for these various facts. Is there anything more?"

"I've only just begun. But I comed with warnings chiefly. There be six Radicals in this parish, and only six."

"Though the Lord knows how many there will be when they hear about the choir," said Eliza Gollop.

"I'm an old-fashioned Liberal myself," declared the vicar. "But I hope your Radicals are sound churchmen, whatever else they may be."

"Humphrey Baskerville is — and so's his son."

"Is that young Mark Baskerville?"

"Yes — tenor bell among the ringers. A very uneven-minded man. He's a wonderful ringer and wrapped up in tenor bell, as if 'twas a heathen idol. In fact, he'm not the good Christian he might be, and he'll ring oftener than he'll pray. Then Saul Luscombe to Trowlesworthy Warren — farmer and rabbit-catcher — be a very hard nut, and so's his man, Jack Head. You won't get either of them inside the church. They say in their wicked way they ain't got no need for sleeping after breakfast of a Sunday — atheists, in fact. The other labouring man from Trowlesworthy is a good Christian, however. He can read, but 'tis doubtful whether he can write."

"You'll have to go to keep your appointment, Dennis," remarked his sister.

"Plenty of time. Is there anything more that's particularly important, Gollop?"

"Lots more. Still, if I'm to be shouted down every minute —— I comed to encourage and fortify you. I comed to tell you to have no fear, because me and sister was on your side, and always ready to fight to the death for righteousness. But you've took the wind out of our sails, in a manner of speaking. If you ban't going to walk in the old paths, I'm terrible afraid you'll find us against you."

"This is impertinence," said Miss Masterman.

"Not at all," answered the clerk's sister. "It's sense. 'Tis a free country, and if you'm going to set a lot of God-fearing, right-minded, sensible people by the ears, the sin be on your shoulders. You'd best to come home, Thomas."

Mr. Masterman looked helplessly at his watch.

"We shall soon arrive at — at — a *modus vivendi*," he said.

"I don't know what that may be, your reverence," she answered; "but if 'tis an empty church, and sour looks, and trouble behind every hedge, then you certainly will arrive at it — and even sooner than you think for."

"He's going to give ear to the Radicals — 'tis too clear," moaned Thomas, as he rose and picked up his hat.

"I can only trust that you two good people do not represent the parish," continued the vicar.

"You'll terrible soon find as we do," said Miss Gollop.

"So much the worse. However, it is well that we understand one another. Next Sunday I shall invite my leading parishioners to meet me in the schoolroom on the following evening. I shall then state my intentions, and listen to the opinions and objections of every man among you."

"And only the men will be invited to the meeting," added Miss Masterman.

"'Tis a parlous come-along-of-it," moaned the parish clerk. "I meant well. You can bear me out, Eliza, that I meant well — never man meant better."

"Good evening," said Miss Masterman, and left them.

"Be sure that we shall soon settle down," prophesied the vicar. "I know you mean well, Gollop; and I mean well, too. Where sensible people are con-

cerned, friction is reduced to a minimum. We shall very soon understand one another and respect one another's opinions."

"If you respect people's opinions, you abide by 'em," declared Miss Gollop.

"Us shan't be able to keep the cart on the wheels — not with a night-gowned choir," foretold her brother.

Then Dennis saw them to the door; they took their leave, and as they went down the vicarage drive, their voices bumbled together, like two slow, shard-borne beetles droning on the night.

CHAPTER V

BOTH the yeoman and gentle families of Devon have undergone a wide and deep disintegration during the recent past. Many are swept away, and the downfall dates back beyond the eighteenth century, when war, dice, and the bottle laid foundations of subsequent ruin; but the descendants of many an ancient stock are still with us, and noble names shall be found at the plough-handle; historical patronymics, on the land.

The race of Baskerville had borne arms and stood for the king in Stuart times. The family was broken in the Parliamentary Wars and languished for certain centuries; then it took heart and lifted head once more. The three brothers who now carried on their line were doubly enriched, for their father had died in good case and left a little fortune behind him; while an uncle, blessed with some tincture of the gipsy blood that had flowed into the native stock a hundred years before, found Devon too small a theatre for his activities and migrated to Australia. He died a bachelor, and left his money to his nephews.

Thus the trio began life under fortunate circumstances; and it appeared that two had prospered and justified existence; while concerning the other little could be affirmed, save a latent and general dislike founded on vague hearsay.

They were different as men well could be, yet each displayed strong individuality and an assertive temperament. All inherited some ancestral strength, but disparities existed between their tastes, their judgments, and their ambitions.

Vivian Baskerville was generous, self-opinionated, and kind-hearted. He loved, before all things, work, yet, in direct opposition to this ruling passion, tolerated and spoiled a lazy eldest son. From the rest of his family he exacted full measure of labour and very perfect obedience. He was a man of crystallised opinions — one who resented change, and built on blind tradition.

Nathan Baskerville had a volatile and swift-minded spirit. He was sympathetic, but not so sympathetic as his manner made him appear. He had a histrionic knack to seem more than he felt; yet this was not all acting, but a mixture of art and instinct. He trusted to tact, to a sense of humour with its accompanying tolerance, and to swift appraisal of human character. Adaptability was his watchword.

Humphrey Baskerville personified doubt. His apparent chill indifference crushed the young and irritated the old. An outward gloominess of manner and a pessimistic attitude to affairs sufficed to turn the folk from him. While he seemed the spirit of negation made alive, he was, nevertheless, a steadfast Christian, and his dark mind, chaotic though it continued to be even into age, enjoyed one precious attribute of chaos and continued plastic and open to impressions. None understood this quality in him. He did not wholly understand it himself. But he was ever seeking for content, and the search had thus far taken him into many fruitless places and landed him in blind alleys not a few.

These adventures, following his wife's death, had served to sour him in some directions; and the late ripening of a costive but keen intelligence did not as yet appear to his neighbours. It remained to be seen whether time would ever achieve a larger wisdom, patience, and understanding in him — whether con-

siderable mental endowments would ultimately lift him nearer peace and content, or plunge him deeper into despondence and incorrigible gloom. He was as interesting as Nathan was attractive and Vivian, obvious.

The attitude of the brothers each to the other may be recorded in a sentence. Vivian immensely admired the innkeeper and depended no little upon his judgment in temporal affairs, but Humphrey he did not understand; Nathan patronised his eldest brother and resented Humphrey's ill-concealed dislike; while the master of Hawk House held Vivian in regard, as an honest and single-minded man, but did not share the world's esteem for Nathan. They always preserved reciprocal amenities and were accounted on friendly terms.

Upon the occasion of the eldest brother's seventieth birthday, both Vivian and Nathan stood at the outer gate of Cadworthy and welcomed Humphrey when he alighted off his semi-blind pony.

Years sat lightly on the farmer. He was a man of huge girth and height above the average. He had a red moon face, with a great fleshy jowl set in white whiskers. His brow was broad and low; his small, pig-like eyes twinkled with kindliness. It was a favourite jest with him that he weighed within a stone or two as much as his brothers put together.

They shook hands and went in, while Mark and Rupert took the ponies. The three brothers all wore Sunday black; and Vivian had a yellow tie on that made disharmony with the crimson of his great cheeks. This mountain of a man walked between the others, and Nathan came to his ear and Humphrey did not reach his shoulder. The last looked a mere shadow beside his brother.

"Seventy year to-day, and have moved two ton of

sacks — a hundredweight to the sack — 'twixt breaksis and noon. And never felt better than this minute," he told them.

"'Tis folly, all the same — this heavy work that you delight in," declared Nathan. "I'm sure Humphrey's of my mind. You oughtn't to do such a lot of young man's work. 'Tis foolish and quite uncalled for."

"The young men can't do it, maybe," said Humphrey. "Vivian be three men rolled into one — with the strength of three for all his threescore and ten years. But you're in the right. He's too old for these deeds. There's no call for weight-lifting and all this sweating labour, though he is such a mighty man of his hands still."

Mr. Baskerville of Cadworthy laughed.

"You be such brainy blids — the pair of you — that you haven't got no patience with me and my schoolboy fun. But, then, I never had no intellects like you — all ran into muscle and bone. And 'tis my pleasure to show the young generation what strength be. The Reverend Masterman preached from a very onusual text Sunday, 'There were giants in those days,' it was — or some such words, if my memory serves me. And Rupert and May, as were along with me, said as surely I belonged to the giant race!"

He laughed with a loud, simple explosion of ingenuous merriment, and led the way to the parlour.

There his wife, in black silk, welcomed her brothers-in-law and received their congratulations. Humphrey fumbled at a parcel which he produced from his breast. He untied the string, wound it up, and put it into his pocket.

"'Tis a book as I heard well spoken of," he said. "There's only one Book for you and me, I believe, Vivian; but an old man as I know came by this, and

he said 'twas light in his darkness; so I went and bought a copy for you by way of something to mark the day. Very like 'tis all rubbish, and if so you can throw it behind the fire."

"Sermons, and good ones without a doubt," answered the farmer. "I'm very fond of sermons, and I'll lay on to 'em without delay and let you know what I think. Not that my opinion of such a thing do count; but I can tell to a hair if they'm within the meaning of Scripture, and that be all that matters. And thank you kindly, I'm sure."

"Tom Gollop's got terrible down-daunted about Mr. Masterman," said Nathan. "He says that your parson is a Radical, and will bring down dreadful things on the parish."

"Old fool," answered Humphrey. "'Tis just what we want, within the meaning of reason, to have a few of the cobwebs swept away."

"But you're a Radical too, and all for sweeping away," argued his eldest brother doubtfully.

"I'm for folly and nonsense being swept away, certainly. I'm for all this cant about humility and our duty to our superiors being swept away. I hate to see chaps pulling their hair to other men no better than themselves, and all that knock-kneed, servile rubbish."

Nathan felt this to be a challenge.

"We take off our hats to the blood in a man's veins, if 'tis blue enough — not to the man."

"And hate the man all the time, maybe — and so act a lie when we cap to him and pretend what isn't true."

"You go too far," declared Nathan.

"I say that we hate anything that's stronger than we are," continued his brother. "We hate brains that's stronger than our own, or pockets that's deeper. The only folk that we smile upon honestly be those we reckon greater fools than ourselves."

Vivian laughed loud at this.

"What a sharp tongue the man hath!" he exclaimed. "But he's wrong, for all that. For if I only smiled at them who had less brains than myself, I should go glum from morn till night."

"Don't say it, father!" cried his wife. "Too humble-minded you be, and always will be."

"'Tis only a very wise man that knows himself for a fool, all the same," declared Nathan. "As for Humphrey here, maybe 'tis because men hate brains bigger than their own, as he says, that he hasn't got a larger circle of friends himself. We all know he's the cleverest man among us."

Humphrey was about to speak again, but restrained the inclination and turned to his nieces who now appeared.

Polly lacked character and existed as the right hand of her mother; but May took physically after Vivian, and represented his first joy and the apple of his eye. She was a girl of great breadth and bulk every way. The beauty of youth still belonged to her clean white and red face, and her yellow hair was magnificent; but it required no prophet to foretell that poor May, when her present colt-like life of physical activity decreased, must swiftly grow too vast for her own comfort or the temptation of the average lover.

The youngest of the family — his Uncle Humphrey's namesake — followed his sisters. He was a brown boy, well set up and shy. Of all men he feared the elder Humphrey most. Now he shook hands evasively.

"Don't stare at the ceiling and the floor, but look me in the eyes. I hate a chap as glances athwart his nose like that," said the master of Hawk House. Whereat the lesser Humphrey scowled and flushed. Then he braced himself for the ordeal and stared steadily into his uncle's eyes.

The duel lasted full two minutes, and the boy's

father laughed and applauded him. At last young Humphrey's eyes fell.

"That's better," said Humphrey the elder. "You learn to keep your gaze on the eyes of other people, my lad, if you want to know the truth about 'em. A voice will teach you a lot, but the eyes are the book for me — eh, Nathan?"

"No doubt there's a deal in that."

"And if 'twas followed, perhaps we shouldn't take our hats off to certain people quite so often as we do," added Humphrey, harking back to the old grievance. "What's the good of being respectful to those you don't respect and ought not to respect?"

"The man's hungry!" said Vivian. "'Tis starvation making him so crusty and so clever. Come now, ban't dinner ready?"

Mrs. Baskerville had departed and Polly with her.

"Hurry 'em up," cried Vivian, and his youngest son hastened to do so.

Meantime Nathan, who was also hungry, and who also desired to display agility of mind before his elder brother, resumed the argument with Humphrey and answered his last question.

"Because we've everything to gain by being civil, and nought to gain by being otherwise, as things are nowadays. Civility costs nothing and the rich expect it of the poor, and gentle expect it of simple. Why not? You can't mar them by being rude; but you can mar yourself. 'The golden rule for a pushing man is to be well thought upon.' That's what our father used to say. And it's sound sense, if you ask me. Of course, I'm not speaking for us, but for the younger generation, and if they can prosper by tact and civility to their betters, why not? We like the younger and humbler people to be civil to us; then why shouldn't they be civil to parson and squire?"

"How if parson be no good, and squire a drinker or a rascal?"

"That's neither here nor there. 'Tis their calling and rank and the weight behind 'em."

"Trash!" said Humphrey sourly. "Let every man be weighed in his own balance and show himself what he is. That's what I demand. Why should we pretend and give people the credit of what they stand for, if they don't stand for it?"

"For a lot of reasons——" began Nathan; then the boy Humphrey returned to say that dinner was ready.

They sat down, and through the steam that rose from a dish of ducks Humphrey looked at Nathan and spoke.

"What reasons?" he said. "For your credit's sake you can't leave it there."

"If you will have it, you will have it — though this isn't the time or place; but Vivian must blame you, not me. Life's largely a game of make-believe and pretence, and, right or wrong, we've got to suffer it. We should all be no better than lonely monkeys or Red Indians, if we didn't pretend a bit more than we meant and say a bit more than we'd swear to. Monkeys don't pretend, and what's the result? They've all gone under."

They wrangled until the food was on the plates, then Vivian, who had been puffing out his cheeks, rolling his eyes and showing uneasiness in other ways, displayed a sudden irritability.

"God damn it!" he cried. "Let's have no more of this! Be the meal to be sarved with no sauce but all this blasted nonsense? Get the drink, Rupert."

Nathan expressed instant regret and strove to lift the tone of the company. But the cloud did not pass so easily. Vivian himself soon forgot the incident; his children and his wife found it difficult. The young

people, indeed, maintained a very dogged taciturnity and only talked among themselves in subdued tones. May and Polly waited upon the rest between the intervals of their own meal. They changed the dishes and went to and from the kitchen. Rupert and his youngest brother helped them, but Ned did not.

Some cheerfulness returned with the beer, and even Humphrey Baskerville strove to assist the general jollity; but he lacked the power. His mind was of the discomfortable sort that cannot suffer opinions, believed erroneous, to pass unchallenged. Sometimes he expressed no more than doubt; sometimes he dissented forcibly to Nathan's generalities. But after Vivian's heat at the beginning of the entertainment, his brother from 'The White Thorn' was cautious, and took care to raise no more dust of controversy.

The talk ran on the new vicar, and the master of Cadworthy spoke well of him.

"An understanding man, and for my part, though I can't pretend to like new things, yet I ban't going to quarrel for nothing. And if he likes to put the boys in surplices and make the maidens sit with the congregation, I don't see no great harm. They can sing praises to God wi' their noses to the east just so easy as they can facing north."

"Well said," declared Humphrey. "I've no patience with such fools as Gollop."

"As one outside and after a different persuasion, I can look on impartial," declared Nathan. "And I think with you both that Masterman is a useful and promising man. As for Gollop, he's the sort that can't see further than the end of the parish, and don't want to do so."

"For why? He'd tell you there's nought beyond," said Humphrey. "He foxes himself to think that the world can go on without change. He fancies

that he alone of us all be a solid lighthouse, stuck up to watch the waves roll by. 'Tis a sign of a terrible weak intellect to think that everybody's changeable but ourselves, and that we only be the ones that know no shadow of changing. Yet I've seen many such men — with a cheerful conceit of themselves too."

"There's lots like that — common as blackberries in my bar," declared Nathan. "Old fellows most times, that reckon they are the only steadfast creatures left on earth, while everybody else be like feathers blown about in a gale of change."

"Every mortal man and woman be bound to change," answered his brother. "'Tis the law of nature. I'd give nought for a man of hard and fast opinions. Such stand high and dry behind the times."

But Vivian would not allow this.

"No, no, Humphrey; that won't do. If us wasn't fixed and firm, the world couldn't go on."

"Vivian means we must have a lever of solid opinions to lift our load in the world," explained Nathan. "Of course, no grown man wants to be flying to a new thing every day of his life, like the young people do."

"The lever's the Bible," declared Humphrey. "I've nought to do with any man who goes beyond that; but, outside that, there's a margin for change as the world grows, and 'tis vain to run your life away from the new facts the wise men find out."

"I don't hold with you," declared Vivian. "At such a gait us would never use the same soap or wear the same clothes two years together. If you'm going to run your life by the newspapers, you'm in the same case with the chaps and the donkey in the fable. What father believed and held to, I shall believe and hold to; for he was a better man than me and knowed a lot more."

Humphrey shook his head.

"If we all thought so, the world would stand still,"

he replied. "'Tis the very argument pushed in the papers to-day about teaching the young people. 'Tis said they must be taught just what their parents want for'm to be taught. And who knows best, I should like to know — the parents and guardians, as have finished their learning years ago and be miles behindhand in their knowledge, or the schoolmasters and mistresses as be up to date in their larning and full of the latest things put into books? There's no standing still with the world any more than there's standing still with the sun. It can't be. Law's against it."

"We must have change," admitted Nathan.

"For sure we must. 'Tis the only way to keep sweet — like water running forward. If you block it in a pond, it goes stagnant; and if you block your brains, they rot."

"Then let us leave it at that," said Vivian's wife. "And now, if you men have done your drink, you can go off and smoke while we tidy up."

But there was yet a duty to perform, and Nathan rose and whispered in Humphrey's ear.

"I think the time's come for drinking his health. It must be done. Will you propose it?"

His brother answered aloud.

"Nathan wants for me to propose your good health, Vivian. But I ban't going to. That sort of thing isn't in my line. I wish you nought but well, and there's an end on't."

"Then I'll say a word," declared the innkeeper, returning to his place. "Fill your glasses — just a drop more, Hester, you must drink — isn't it to your own husband? And I say here, in this family party, that 'tis a proud and a happy thing to have for the head of the family such a man as our brother — your husband, Hester; and your father, you boys and girls. Long may he be spared to stand up among us and set

She was puzzled.

"What d'you mean by that?" she asked, and, from the standpoint of his nimble wit, he roared.

"There you are again!" he said. "I can't explain; but the lack in you be summed in the question."

"You'm a hopeless case," she said. "We all laugh at you, and yet couldn't for the life of us tell what on earth 'tis we be laughing at."

"That's the very highest art and practice of playing the fool!" he told them.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE Wigmore Down descends in mighty shoulders clad with oak, there meet the rivers Plym and Mew, after their diverse journeyings on Dartmoor. The first roars wild and broken from its cradle aloft on the midmost waste, and falls with thunder under Cadworthy and beneath the Dewerstone; the other, as becomes a stream that has run through peaceful valleys by bridges and the hamlets of men, shall be found to wander with more gentle current before she passes into the throbbing bosom of her sister. Above them, on a day in early summer, the hill ascended washed with light, spread hugely for the pomp of the leaf.

From Plym beneath, flashing arrowy under their lowermost branches, to the granite tonsure of the hill above, ten thousand trees ascended in a shining raiment of all greens — a garment that fitted close to the contours of each winding ridge, sharp cleeve, and uplifted knoll of the elevation that they covered. Lustrous and shimmering, this forest garb exhibited every vernal tint that nature knows, for upon a prevalent, triumphant fabric of golden-green were cast particular jewels and patterns; against the oaken undertones, where they spread a dappled verdure of amber and carmine, there sprang the tardy ash, shone the rowan's brightness, sparkled the whitethorn at river's brink, and rose the emerald pavilions of the larch. Beeches thrust their diaphanous foliage in veils athwart the shadows; here a patchwork of blue firs added new harmonies to the hill; here the glittering birch reflected light from

every tiny leaf; and here the holly's sobriety was broken by inflorescence and infant foliage, young and bright.

The forest spread its new-born leaves under a still, grey evening, upon which, suddenly, the sun thrust through before it sank. Shafts of light, falling from west to east upon the planes of the woods, struck out a path of sudden glory along the pine-tops and thrust down in rain of red gold even to the river's face; while on Dewerstone's self, where it towered above the trees and broke the green with grey, this gracious light briefly brooded and flashed genial into dark crevices and hidden nests of birds.

The great rock falls by abrupt acclivity to the water; it towers with pinnacle and peak aloft. Planted in the side of the forest it stands veined, scarred; it is fretted with many colours, cut and torn into all manner of fantastic shapes by work of roots and rain, by centuries of storm and the chisel of the lightning. Bedded here, with ivy on its front, the smile of evening for a crown, and the forest like a green sea breaking in foam of leaves around it, the Water Stone stood. Night was already come upon its eaves and cornices; from its feet ascended musical thunder of Plym in a riot of rocks; and aloft, clashing, echoing and re-echoing from scarp and precipice, there rang the cheerful chiming music of unnumbered jackdaws, who made these crags their home.

Mark Baskerville, descending into the valley from Shaugh, beheld this scene with understanding. He had been well educated; he was sentimental; he regarded wild Nature in a manner rare amid those born and bred upon her bosom. Beauty did not find him indifferent; old legends gave him joy. He knew the folk-tales of the land and dwelt upon them still with pleasure — an instinct surviving from boyhood, and deliberately suffered to survive. He loved the emotion

of awe and cultivated it; he led a life from choice much secluded; he had walked hitherto blind, in so far as women were concerned; but now a woman had entered his life, and Nature shone glorified throughout by the experience.

Mark was in love with Cora Lintern; yet this prime fact did not lessen his regard for the earth and the old stories concerning it. He found the things that were good aforetime still good, but changed. His emotions were all sharpened and intensified. His strength was stronger; his weakness was weaker than of yore. She was never out of his thoughts; she made the sunlight warmer, the bird's song sweeter, the night more wonderful. He woke and found himself brave enough to approach her in the deep, small hours of morning; but with dawn came fear, and with day his courage melted. By night also he made rhymes that seemed beautiful to him and brought moisture to his eyes; but when the sun came and he repeated his stumbling periods, he blushed at them and banished them.

She was friendly and not averse; but she was clever, and had many friends among young men. Nathan Baskerville rejoiced in her, and often foretold a notable match for Cora. What Mark could offer seemed very little to Mark himself. His father, indeed, was reputed rich; but life at Hawk House revealed no sign of it. They lived hard, and Humphrey Baskerville affected a frugality that would have been unusual in the homes of humbler people.

Humphrey had often told his son that he did not know how to spend money; and as for Mark, until the present, he had shared his father's indifference and been well content. But he felt that Cora might be fond of money; and he was glad sometimes that his father spent so little; because, if all went well, there must surely come a time when he would be able to

rejoice Cora with great riches. The obstacle, however, he felt to be himself. His distrust of himself was morbid; the folk said that he was frightened of his own voice, and only spoke through the tenor bell of St. Edward's.

Now he descended into the shadows of the valley and moved along the brink of Plym, seeking for certain young wood, ripe for cutting. Presently Mark found what he sought, but made no immediate effort to begin work. He flung down a frail which contained a bill-hook and saw. Then he sat upon a rock overhanging the river and buried himself in his own thoughts.

A path wound beside the stream, and along it sauntered suddenly the maiden of this man's dream. She looked fair enough and moved in deep apparent unconsciousness of any human presence.

But her ignorance was simulated. She had seen young Baskerville pass over the hill; she had known his destination, and by a détour she had entered the valley from below.

Now she started and exhibited astonishment.

"Mark! Whoever would have thought——! What be you doing here all alone like this—and you not a fisherman?"

He stammered, and grew pale.

"Fancy meeting; and I might ask what brought you, Cora?"

"Oh, just a silly fondness for the river and the trees and my own thoughts. I like being about among the wild things, though I dare say you won't believe it."

"Of course, I'll believe it—gladly too. Don't I like being about among 'em better than anything else? I'm very pleased to meet you, I'm sure. There's no lovelier bit of the river than here."

"Dewerstone do look fine to-night," she said, glancing up at the crags above them.

"It does, then. The Water Stone I always call it, since I read in a book that that was what it meant. 'Tis the great stone by the water, you see. Have you ever heard tell of the Black Hunter, Cora? But perhaps you don't hold with such old wife's tales?"

She put him at his ease and assured him that she loved ancient fables and liked to go on believing them, despite her better knowledge.

"Just the same as me!" he cried eagerly. "The very thing I do. How wonderful you should feel the same! I know 'tis rubbish, yet I let it go sadly. I'd believe in the pixies, if I could!"

"Who was the Black Hunter, if you don't mind telling me?" she asked. "I'll sit here a bit afore I go on, if it won't be to hinder you."

"Proud I am, I'm sure," he said. "And as for him, the Black Hunter, that's no more than another name for the Devil himself. 'Twas thought that he'd come here by night with his great, bellowing, red-eyed dogs, and go forth to hunt souls. A coal-black horse he rode; but sometimes he'd set out afoot, for 'tis well remembered how once in the deep snow, on a winter morn, human footprints, along with hoofmarks, were traced to the top of the hill, but not down again!"

"The devil flew away with somebody?"

"So the old story says. But I like the thought of the little Heath Hounds better. For they hunt and harry old Nick's self. They are the spirits of the young children who die before they are baptised; and the legend hath it that they win to heaven soon or late by hunting the Prince of Darkness. 'Tis the children that we bury with maimed rites upon 'Chrisomers' Hill' in the churchyard. They put that poor woman who killed herself in the same place, because the old parson wouldn't read 'sure and certain hope' over her."

But Cora was not interested in his conversation, though she pretended to be. She endeavoured to turn speech into a more personal road.

"What have you come here for? I hadn't any idea you ever took walks alone."

"I take hundreds — terrible poor hand at neighbouring with people, I am — like my father. But I'm here to work — getting handles for tools. There's no wood for light tools like alder. You know the old rhyme —

> 'When aller's leaf is so big as a penny,
> The stick will wear so tough as any.'

That's true enough, for I've proved it."

"Set to work and I'll watch you, if I may."

"Proud, I'm sure. And I'll see you home after. But there's no haste. I was thinking that bare, dark corner in the garden at Undershaugh might do very nice for ferns — if you'd care ——?"

"The very thing! How kind to think of it. I love the garden and the flowers. But none else cares about them. D'you think you could get me one of they king ferns? But I suppose that would be too much to ask."

"I'll get you more than one."

"I'll try to plant 'em then, but I'm not very clever."

"I'll come and make a bit of a rockery myself, if — if you like."

"'Like!' I should love it. But 'tis very good of you to bother about a stupid girl."

"Don't you say that. Far, far from stupid. Never was a cleverer girl, I'm sure."

She shook her head and talked about the ferns. Then she became personal.

"I've always felt somehow with you; but I sup-

pose it ban't maidenly to say such things — but I've always felt as you understood me, Mark."

"Ah!" he said. "And as for me, I've felt — God, He knows what I've felt."

The man broke off, and she smiled at him and dropped her eyes. She knew the thing that shared his heart with her, and now spoke of it.

"And through you I've got to love tenor bell almost as much as you do. Of a Sunday the day isn't complete till I've heard the beautiful note of your bell and thought of you at the rope. I always somehow think of you when I hear that bell; and I think of the bell when I see you! Ban't that strange?"

"'Tis your wonderful quick mind, and you couldn't say anything to please me better."

"I wanted to ask you about the bells. I'm so ignorant; but I thought, if 'twasn't silly of me, I'd ask you about 'em. I suppose they'm awful difficult to ring?"

"Not a bit. Only wants steady practice. The whole business is little understood, but 'tis simple enough. I've gone into it all from the beginning, and I'm glad — very glad — you care about it. The first thing is for a ring of bells to be in harmony with itself, and founders ought to be free to make 'em so. The bells are never better than when they are broken out of the moulds, and every touch of the lathe, or chip of the chisel, is music lost. The thickness of the sound-bow should be one-thirteenth of the diameter, you must know; but modern bells are made for cheapness. Long in the waist and high in the shoulder they should be for true fineness of sound; but they cast 'em with short waists and flat shoulders now. 'Tis easier to hang and ring them so; but they don't give the same music. My tenor is a wonderful good bell — a maiden bell, as we say — one cast true, that has never had a

chip at the sound-bow. 'I call the quick to church and dead to grave,' is her motto. A Pennington bell she is, and no bell-founder ever cast a better. Every year makes her sweeter, for there's nothing improves bell-metal like time."

"I suppose it wouldn't be possible for me actually to see the bells?"

"It can be done and shall be," he promised. Then he went off again.

"I've been in nearly every bell-cot and bell-turret in Devonshire, one time and another, and I've took a hand in change-ringing far and wide; but our ring of six, for its size and weight, can't be beat in the county, and there's no sweeter tenor that I've heard than mine. And I'm very hopeful that Mr. Masterman will take my advice and have our wheels and gear looked to, and the bell-chamber cleaned out. 'Tis the home of birds, and the nest litter lies feet deep up there. The ladder's all rotten too. We ought to have stays and slides; and our ropes are a bit too heavy, and lack tuftings for the sally. I'm hopeful he'll have a care for these things."

He prattled on, for it was his subject and always loosed his tongue. She was bored to death, but from time to time, when he feared that he wearied her, she assured him that her interest did not wane and was only less than his own. He showed unusual excitement at this meeting, was lifted out of himself, and talked until grey gloaming sank over the valley and the jackdaws were silent. Then Cora started up and declared that she must return home quickly.

"Listening to you has made me forget all about the time and everything," she said. "They'll wonder whatever has befallen me."

"I'll see you home," he answered. "'Tis my fault you'll be late, and I must take the blame."

"And I've kept you from your work, I'm afraid."

"That's no matter at all. To-morrow will do just as well for the alder."

He rose and walked beside her. She asked him to help her at one place in the wood, and her cool, firm hand thrilled him. Once or twice he thought to take this noble opportunity and utter the thing in his heart; but he could not bring himself to do it. Then, at her gate, he left her, and they exchanged many assurances of mutual thanks and obligation. He promised to bring the ferns in three days' time, and undertook to spend an evening with the Linterns, build the rockery, and stay to supper with the family afterwards.

He walked home treading on air, with his mind full of hope and happiness. Cora had never been so close as on this day; she had never vouchsafed such an intimate glimpse of her beautiful spirit before. Each word, each look seemed to bring her nearer; and yet, when he reflected on his own imperfections, a wave of doubt swept coldly over him. He supped in silence, but, after the meal, he confessed the thoughts in his mind.

"Never broke a twig this evening," he said. "Was just going to begin, when who should come along but Cora Lintern."

"Has she forgiven parson for turning her out of the choir? Can't practise that side-glance at the men no more now."

"She's not that sort, father."

"Not with a face like hers? That girl would rather go hungry than without admiration and flattering. A little peacock, and so vain as one."

"You're wrong there. I'll swear it. She's very different to what you reckon. Why, this very evening, there she was under the Water Stone all alone — walking along by herself just for love of the place. Often goes there, she tells me."

"Very surprised to find you there — eh?"

"That she was. And somehow I got talking — such a silent man as me most times. But I found myself chattering about the bells and one thing and another. We've got a lot more in common than you might think."

Mr. Baskerville smoked and looked into the fire.

"Well, don't be in a hurry. I'm not against marriage for the young men. But bide your time, till you've got more understanding of women."

"I'll never find another like her. I'm sure she'd please you, father."

"You'll be rich in a small way, as the world goes, presently. Remember, she knows that as well as you do."

"She never speaks of money. Just so simple and easily pleased as I am myself, for that matter. She loves natural things — just the things you care about yourself."

"And very much interested in tenor bell, no doubt?"

"How did you guess that? But 'tis perfectly true. She is; and she said a very kind thing that was very hopeful to me to hear. She said that the bell always put her in mind of me, and I always put her in mind of the bell."

"I wonder! And did you tell her what was writ on the bell?"

"Yes, I did, father."

"And d'you know what she thought?"

Mark shook his head.

"She thought that the sooner it called you and her to church together, and the sooner it called me to my grave, the pleasanter life would look for her hard eyes."

"Father! 'Tis cruel and unjust to say such things."

"Haven't I seen her there o' Sundays ever since

she growed up? There's nought tells you more about people than their ways in church. As bright as a bee and smart and shining; but hard — hard as the nether millstone, that woman's heart. Have a care of her; that's all I'll say to you."

"I hope to God you'll know her better some day, father."

"And I hope you will, my lad; and I'll use your strong words too, and hope to God you'll know her better afore 'tis too late."

"This is cruel, and I'm bitter sorry to hear you say it," answered the young man, rising. Then he went out and left his father alone.

Elsewhere Phyllis Lintern had eagerly inquired of Cora as to the interview with the bellringer.

The girls shared many secrets and were close friends. They knew unconsciously that their brother was more to the mother than were they. Heathman adored Mrs. Lintern and never wearied of showing it; but for his sisters he cared little, and they felt no interest in him.

Now Phyllis sympathised with Cora's ambitions and romances.

"How was it?" she asked. "I warrant you brought him to the scratch!"

"'Tis all right," declared her sister. "'Tis so good as done. The word was on his tongue coming up-along in the dimpsy; but it stuck in his throat. I know the signs well enough. However, 'twill slip out pretty soon, I reckon. He's a good sort, though fidgety, but he's gotten lovely eyes. I'll wake him up and smarten him up, too — presently."

CHAPTER VII

WHEN man builds a house on Dartmoor, he plants trees to protect it. Sometimes they perish; sometimes they endure to shield his dwelling from the riotous and seldom-sleeping winds. Round the abode of Humphrey Baskerville stood beech and pine. A solid old house lurked beneath, like a bear in its grove. People likened its face to the master's — the grey, worn, tar-pitched roof to his hair, and the small windows on either side of the door to his eyes. A few apple trees were in the garden, and currant and gooseberry bushes prospered indifferent well beneath them. Rhubarb and a row of elders also flourished here. The latter were permitted to exist for their fruit, and of the berries Mrs. Susan Hacker, Humphrey's widowed housekeeper, made medicinal preparations supposed to possess value.

Hawk House lay under a tor, and behind it the land towered to a stony waste that culminated in wild masses of piled granite, where the rowan grew and the vixen laid her cubs. From this spot one might take a bird's-eye survey of Humphrey Baskerville's domain. Gold lichens had fastened on the roof, and the folk conceited that since there was no more room in the old man's house for his money, it began to ooze out through the tiles.

Humphrey himself now sat on a favourite stone aloft and surveyed his possessions and the scene around them. It was his custom in fair weather to spend many hours sequestered upon the tor. Dwarf oaks grew in the clitters, and he marked the passage of the

time by their activity, by the coming of migrant birds, by the appearance of the infant foxes and by other natural signs and tokens. Beneath Hawk House there subtended a great furze-clad space flanked with woods. The Rut, as it was called, fell away to farms and fertile fields, and terminated in a glen through which the little Torry river passed upon her way to Plym. Cann Wood fringed the neighbouring heights, and far away to the south Laira's lake extended and Plymouth appeared — faint, grey, glittering under a gauze of smoke.

The tor itself was loved by hawks and stoats, crows and foxes. Not a few people, familiar with the fact that Humphrey here took his solitary walks and kept long vigils, would affirm that he held a sort of converse with these predatory things and learned from them their winged and four-footed cunning. His sympathy, indeed, was with fox and hawk rather than with hunter and hound. He admitted it, but in no sense of companionship with craft did he interest himself in the wild creatures. He made no fatuous imputation of cruelty to the hawk, or cunning to the fox. His bent of mind, none the less, inclined him to admire their singlehanded fight for life against long odds; and thus he, too, fell into fallacy; but his opinion took a practical turn and was not swiftly shattered, as such emotions are apt to be, when the pitied outlaw offers to the sentimental spectator a personal taste of his quality.

If a hawk stooped above his chickens, he felt a sort of contempt for the screaming, flying fowls — let the hawk help itself if it could — and did not run for his gun. Indeed, he had no gun. As men said of this or that obstinate ancient that he had never travelled in a train, so they affirmed, concerning Humphrey Baskerville, that he had never in his life fired a gun.

He sat and smoked a wooden pipe and reflected on the puzzles of his days. He knew that he was held in little esteem, but that had never troubled him. His inquiring spirit rose above his fellow-creatures; and he prided himself upon the fact, and did not see that just in this particular of a flight too lofty did he fail of the landmarks and sure ground he sought.

A discontent, in substance very distinguished and noble, imbued his consciousness. He was still seeking solace out of life and a way that should lead to rest. But he could not find it. He was in arms on the wrong road. He missed the fundamental fact that from humanity and service arise not only the first duties of life, but also the highest rewards that life can offer. He had little desire towards his fellow-creatures. His mind appeared to magnify their deficiencies and weakness. He was ungenerous in his interpretation of motives. Mankind awoke his highest impatience. He sneered at his own shortcomings daily, and had no more mercy for the manifold disabilities of human nature in general. In the light of his religion and his learning, he conceived that man should be by many degrees a nobler and a wiser thing than he found him; and this conclusion awoke impatience and a fiery aversion. He groped therefore in a blind alley, for as yet service of man had not brought its revelation to his spirit, or opened the portals of content. He failed to perceive that the man who lives rationally for men, with all thereby involved in his duty to himself, is justifying his own existence to the limit of human capacity.

Instead, he fulfilled obligations to his particular God with all his might, and supposed this rule of conduct embraced every necessity. He despised his neighbour, but he despised himself also. Thus he was logical, but such a rule of conduct left him lonely.

Hence it came about that darkness clothed him like a garment, and that his kind shunned him, and cared not to consider him.

He sat silent and motionless. His gift of stillness had often won some little intimate glimpse of Nature, and it did so now. A fox went by him at close quarters. It passed absorbed in its own affairs, incautious and without fear. Then suddenly it saw him, braced its muscles and slipped away like a streak of cinnamon light through the stones.

It made for the dwarf oaks beneath the head of the tor, and the watcher saw its red stern rise and its white-tipped brush jerk this way and that as it leapt from boulder to boulder. A big and powerful fox — so Humphrey perceived; one that had doubtless stood before hounds in his time, and would again.

Arrived at the confines of the wood, the brute hurried himself no more; but rested awhile and, with a sort of highwayman insolence, surveyed the object of alarm. Then it disappeared, and the man smiled to himself and was glad that he had seen this particular neighbour.

At the poultry-house far below, moved Mrs. Hacker. Viewed from this elevation she presented nothing but a sun-bonnet and a great white square of apron. She wore black, and her bust disappeared seen thus far away, though her capacious person might be noted at a mile. Susan Hacker was florid, taciturn, and staunch to her master. If she had a hero, it was Mr. Baskerville; and if she had an antipathy, Miss Eliza Gollop stood for that repugnance.

Of Susan it might be said that she was honest and not honest. In her case, though, she would have scorned to take a crust; she listened at doors. To steal a spoon was beyond her power; but to steal information not intended for her ears did not outrage

her moral sense. Her rare triumphs were concerned with Humphrey's ragged wardrobe; and when she could prevail with him to buy a new suit of clothes, or burn an old one, she felt the day had justified itself.

Now, through the clitters beneath him, there ascended a man, and Humphrey prepared to meet his nephew. He had marked Rupert speak with Mrs. Hacker and seen her point to the tor. It pleased the uncle that this youth should sometimes call unasked upon him, for he rated Rupert as the sanest and usefulest of his kindred. In a sense Rupert pleased Humphrey better than his own son did. A vague instinct to poetry and sentiment and things of abstract beauty, which belonged as an ingredient to Mark's character, found no echo in his father's breast.

"I be come to eat my dinner along with you and fetch a message for Mark," began the young man. "Mr. Masterman's meeting, to tell everybody about the play, will be held in the parish room early next month, and parson specially wants you and Mark to be there. There's an idea of reviving some old-fangled customs. I dare say 'tis a very good idea, and there will be plenty to lend a hand; but I doubt whether Mark will dress up and spout poetry for him — any more than I would."

"He means to perform 'St. George' next Christmas and invite the countryside," said Mr. Baskerville. "Well, one man's meat is another man's poison. He's young and energetic. He'll carry it through somehow with such material as lies about him. The maidens will all want to be in it, no doubt."

"I think 'tis foolery, uncle."

"You think wrong, then. Ban't always foolery to hark back to old ways. He's got his ideas for waking the people up. You and me might say, 'don't wake 'em up'; but 'tisn't our business. It is his business,

as a minister, to open their eyes and polish their senses. So let him try with childish things first — not that he'll succeed, for he won't."

"Then what's the good of trying?"

"The man must earn his money."

"Fancy coming to a dead-alive hole like this! Why, even Jack Head from Trowlesworthy — him as works for Mr. Luscombe — even he laughs at Shaugh."

"He's a rare Radical, is Head. 'Tis the likes of him the upper people don't want to teach to read or to think — for fear of pickling a rod for themselves. But Head will be thinking. He's made so. I like him."

"He laughed at me for one," said Rupert; "and though I laughed back, I smarted under his tongue. He says for a young and strapping chap like me to stop at Cadworthy doing labourer's work for my father, be a poor-spirited and even a shameful thing. He says I ought to blush to follow a plough or move muck, with the learning I've learnt. Of course, 'tis a small, mean life, in a manner of speaking, for a man of energy as loves work like I do."

Mr. Baskerville scratched his head with the mouthpiece of his pipe, and surveyed Rupert for some time without speaking.

Then he rose, sniffed the air, and buttoned up his coat.

"We'll walk a bit and I'll show you something," he said.

They set out over Shaugh Moor and Rupert proceeded.

"I do feel rather down on my luck, somehow — especially about Milly Luscombe. It don't seem right or fair exactly — as if Providence wasn't on my side."

"Don't bleat that nonsensical stuff," said his uncle. "You're the sort that cry out to Providence if you fall into a bed of nettles — instead of getting up quick and looking for a dock-leaf. Time to cry to Providence when you're in a fix you can't get out of single-handed. If you begin at your time of life, and all about nothing too, belike 'twill come to be like the cry of 'Wolf, wolf!' and then, when you really do get into trouble and holloa out, Providence won't heed."

"Milly Luscombe's not a small thing, anyway. How can I go on digging and delving while father withstands me and won't hear a word about her?"

"She's too good for you."

"I know it; but she don't think so, thank the Lord."

"Your father's a man that moves in a groove. Maybe you go safer that way; but not further. The beaten track be his motto. He married late in life, and it worked very well; so it follows to his narrow mind that late in life is the right and only time to marry."

"I wish you'd tell him that you hold with Milly and think a lot of her. Father has a great opinion of your cleverness, I'm sure."

"Not he! 'Tis your uncle Nathan that he sets store by. Quite natural that he should. He's a much cleverer man than me, and knows a lot more about human nature. See how well all folk speak of him. Can't you get him your side? Your father would soon give ear to you if Uncle Nathan approved."

"'Tis an idea. And Uncle Nat certainly be kind always. I might try and get him to do something. He's very friendly with Mr. Saul Luscombe, Milly's uncle."

"How does Luscombe view it?"

"He'll be glad to have Milly off his hands."

"More fool him then. For there's no more understanding girl about."

"So Jack Head says. Ban't often he's got a good word for anybody; but he's told me, in so many words, that Milly be bang out of the common. He said it because his savage opinions never fluster her."

They stood on Hawk Tor, and beneath them stretched, first, the carpet of the heath. Then the ground fell into a valley, where water meadows spread about a stream, and beyond, by woods and homesteads, the earth ascended again to Shaugh Prior. The village, perched upon the apex of the hill, twinkled like a jewel. Glitter of whitewash and rosy-wash shone under the grey roofs; sunlight and foliage sparkled and intermingled round the church tower; light roamed upon the hills, revealing and obscuring detail in its passage. To the far west, above deep valleys, the world appeared again; but now it had receded and faded and merged in tender blue to the horizon. Earth spread before the men in three huge and simple planes: of heath and stone sloping from north to south; of hillside and village and hamlet perched upon their proper crest; of the dim, dreaming distance swept with the haze of summer and rising to sky-line.

"That's not small — that's big," said Humphrey Baskerville. "Plenty of room here for the best or worse that one boy can do."

But Rupert doubted.

"Think of the world out of sight, uncle. This bit spread here be little more than a picture in its frame."

"Granted; but the frame's wide enough to cage all that your wits will ever work. You can run here and wear your fingers to the bone without bruising yourself against any bars. Go down in the churchyard and take a look at the Baskerville slates — fifty of 'em if

there's one: your grandfather, your great-uncle, the musicker, and all the rest. And every man and woman of the lot lived and died, and suffered and sweated, and did good or evil within this picture-frame."

"All save the richest — him that went to foreign parts and made a fortune and sent back tons of money to father and you and Uncle Nat."

Humphrey laughed.

"Thou hast me there!" he said. "But don't be discontented. Bide a bit and see how the wind blows. I'm not against a man following the spirit that calls him; but wait and find out whether 'tis a true voice or only a lying echo. What does Milly say?"

"'Tis Milly have put the thought into me, for that matter. She's terrible large in her opinions. She holds that father haven't got no right to refuse to let us be tokened. She'd come and talk to him, if I'd let her. A regular fear-nothing, she is."

"What would she have you do?"

"Gird up and be off. She comes of a very wandering family, and, of course, one must allow for that. I've nought to say against it. But they can't bide in one spot long. Something calls 'em to be roaming."

"The tribe of Esau."

They talked on, and Rupert found himself the better for some caustic but sane counsel.

"'Tis no good asking impossibilities from you, and I'm the last to do it," said Humphrey. "There are some things we can't escape from, and our characters are one of them. There's no more sense in trying to run from your character than in trying to run from your shadow. Too often your character is your shadow, come to think on it; and cruel black at that. But don't be impatient. Wait and watch yourself as

well as other people. If these thoughts have been put in your head by the girl, they may not be natural to you, and they may not be digested by you. See how your own character takes 'em. I'm not against courting, mind, nor against early marriages; and if this woman be made of the stuff to mix well and close with your own character, then marry her and defy the devil and all his angels to harm you. To take such a woman is the best day's work that even the hardest working man can do in this world. But meantime don't whine, but go ahead and gather wisdom and learn a little about the things that happen outside the picture-frame — as I do."

They turned presently and went back to dinner.

Rupert praised his uncle, and declared that life looked the easier for his advice.

"'Tis no good being called 'The Hawk' if you can't sharpen your wits as well as your claws," said the old man. "Yes — you're astonished — but I know what they call me well enough."

"I knocked a chap down last Sunday on Cadworthy bridge for saying it," declared Rupert.

"Very thoughtful and very proper to stand up for your family; but I'm not hurt. Maybe there's truth in it. I've no quarrel with the hawks — or the herons either — for all they do eat the trout. By all accounts there was birds to eat trout afore there was men to eat 'em. We humans have invented a saying that possession is nine points of the law; but we never thought much of that when it comed to knocking our weaker neighbours on the head — whether they be birds or men."

"You've made me a lot more contented with the outlook, anyway."

"I'm glad to hear it. Content's the one thing I'd wish you — and wish myself. I can't see the way

very clear yet. Let me know if ever you come by it."

"You! Why, you'm the most contented of any of us."

"Come and eat, and don't talk of what you know nought," said Mr. Baskerville.

They went through the back yard of the homestead presently, where a hot, distinctive odour of pigs saturated the air. As they passed by, some young, very dirty, pink porkers grunted with fat, amiable voices and cuddled to their lean mother, where she lay in a lair of ordure.

"That's content," explained Humphrey; "it belongs to brainless things, and only to them. I haven't found it among men and women yet, and I never count to. Rainbow gold in this world. Yet, don't mistake me, I'm seeking after it still."

"Why seek for it, if there's no such thing, uncle?"

"Well may you ask that. But the answer's easy. Because 'tis part of my character to seek for it, Rupert. Character be stronger than reason's self, if you can understand that. I seek because I'm driven."

"You might find it after all, uncle. There must be such a thing — else there'd be no word for it."

The older sighed.

"A young and hopeful fashion of thought," he said. "But you're out there. Men have made up words for many a fine, fancied thing their hearts long for; but the word is all — stillborn out of poor human hope."

He brooded deep into his own soul upon this thought and spoke little more that day. But Mark was waiting for his dinner when they returned, and he and Rupert found themes in common to occupy them through the meal.

The great project of the new vicar chiefly supplied

conversation. Rupert felt indifferent, but Mark was much interested.

"I'm very willing to lend a hand all I can, and I expect the parish will support it," he said. "But as for play-acting myself, and taking a part, I wouldn't for all the world. It beats me how anybody can get up on a platform and speak a speech afore his fellow-creatures assembled."

"The girls will like it," foretold Rupert.

"Cora Lintern is to play a part," declared Mark; "and no doubt she'll do it amazing well."

Rupert was up in arms at once.

"I should think they'll ask Milly Luscombe too. She's got more wits than any of 'em."

"She may have as much as Cora, but not more, I can assure you of that," answered Mark firmly.

He rarely contradicted a statement or opposed an assertion; but upon this great subject his courage was colossal.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. MASTERMAN and his sister made more friends than enemies. The man's good-nature and energy attracted his parishioners; while Miss Masterman, though not genial, was sincere. A certain number followed the party of Mr. Gollop and Eliza, yet, as time passed, it diminished. The surplices arrived; the girls were turned out of the choir; but the heavens did not fall. Even the Nonconformists of Shaugh Prior regarded the young vicar with friendliness, and when he called a meeting at the parish room, Mr. Nathan Baskerville and others who stood for dissent, attended it in an amiable spirit.

Rumours as to the nature of the proposition had leaked out, and they were vague; but a very general interest had been excited, and when the evening came the vicar, his churchwardens, and friends, found a considerable company assembled.

There were present Vivian and Nathan Baskerville, with most of the former's family. Mrs. Lintern and her two daughters from Undershaugh also came; while Heathman Lintern, Ned Baskerville, and other young men stood in a group at the rear of the company. From Trowlesworthy arrived the warrener, Saul Luscombe, his niece, Milly, and his man, Jack Head. People looked uneasy at sight of the last, for he was a revolutionary and firebrand. The folk suspected that he held socialistic views, and were certain that he worked harm on the morals of younger people. Susan Hacker, at her master's wish, attended the meeting and sat impassive among friends. Thomas Gollop and Joe Voysey, the vicarage gardener, sat together; but Miss

Gollop was not present, because her services were occupied with the newly-born.

A buzz and babel filled the chamber and the heat increased. Jack Head opened a window. Whereupon Mr. Gollop rose and shut it again. The action typified that eternal battle of principle which waged between them. But Vivian Baskerville was on the side of fresh air.

"Let be!" he shouted. "Us don't want to be roasted alive, Thomas!"

So the window was opened once more, and Head triumphed.

Dennis Masterman swiftly explained his desire and invited the parish to support him in reviving an ancient and obsolete ceremonial.

"The oldest men among you must remember the days of the Christmas mummers," he said. "I've heard all about them from eye-witnesses, and it strikes me that to get up the famous play of 'St. George,' with the quaint old-world dialogue, would give us all something to do this winter, and be very interesting and instructive, and capital fun. There are plenty among you who could act the parts splendidly, and as the original version is rather short and barren, I should have some choruses written in, and go through it and polish it up, and perhaps even add a character or two. In the old days it was all done by the lads, but why not have some lasses in it as well? However, these are minor points to be decided later. Would you like the play? that's the first question. It is a revival of an ancient custom. It will interest a great many people outside our parish; and if it is to be done at all, it must be done really well. Probably some will be for it and some against. For my part, I only want to please the greater number. Those who are for it had better elect a spokesman, and let him say a word first; then we'll hear those who are against."

The people listened quietly; then they bent this way and that, and discussed the suggestion. Some rose and approached Vivian Baskerville, where he sat beside his brother. After some minutes of buzzing conversation, during which Vivian shook his head vigorously, and Nathan as vigorously nodded, the latter rose with reluctance, and the folk stamped their feet.

"'Tis only because of my brother's modest nature that I get up," he explained. "As a Church of England man and a leader among us, they very properly wanted for him to speak. But he won't do it, and no more will young Farmer Waite, and no more will Mr. Luscombe of Trowlesworthy; so I'll voice 'em to the best of my power. Though I'm of t'other branch of the Christian Church, yet my friends will bear me out that I've nothing but kind feeling and regard for all of them, and in such a pleasant matter as this I shall do all in my power to help your reverence, as we all shall. For I do think there's none but will make the mummers welcome again, and lend a hand to lift the fun into a great success. Me and my brother and Luscombe, and Waite and Gollop, and Joe Voysey, and a good few more, can well remember the old mumming days; and we'll all do our best to rub up our memories. So what we all say is, 'Go ahead, Mr. Masterman, and good luck to it!'"

Applause greeted Nathan. The folk were filled with admiration at his ready turn of speech. He sat down again between Mrs. Lintern and Cora. Everybody clapped their hands.

Then came a hiss from the corner where Jack Head stood.

"A dissentient voice," declared the clergyman. "Who is that?"

"My name is Jack Head, and I be gwaine to offer objections," said the man stoutly.

"Better save your wind then!" snapped Mr. Gollop. "You be one against the meeting."

Head was a middle-aged, narrow-browed, and underhung individual of an iron-grey colour. His body was long and thin; his shoulders were high; his expression aggressive, yet humorous. He had swift wits and a narrow understanding. He was observant and impressed with the misery of the world; but he possessed no philosophical formulæ to balance his observation or counsel patience before the welter of life. He was honest, but scarce knew the meaning of amenity.

"One or not won't shut my mouth," he said. "I'm a member of the parish so much as you, though I don't bleat a lot of wild nonsense come every seventh day, and I say that to spend good time and waste good money this way be a disgrace, and a going back instead of going forward. What for do we want to stir up a lot of silly dead foolishness that our grandfathers invented? Ban't there nothing better to do with ourselves and our wits than dress up like a ship-load of monkeys and go play-acting? We might so well start to wassail the apple-trees and put mourning on the bee-butts when a man dies. I'm against it, and I propose instead that Mr. Masterman looks round him and sees what a miserable jakes of a mess his parish be in, and spends his time trying to get the landlords to——"

"Order! Order! Withdraw that!" cried out Mr. Gollop furiously. "How dare this infidel man up and say the parish be in a jakes of a mess? Where's Ben North?"

"I'm here, Thomas," said a policeman, who stood at the door.

"You'm a silly old mumphead," replied Jack. "To hear you about this parish—God's truth! I'll tell you this, my brave hero. When the devil was showing the Lord the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of 'em,

he kept his thumb on Shaugh Prior, so as none should see what a dung-heap of a place it was."

"Order! Order!" cried Miss Masterman shrilly, and Mr. Gollop grew livid.

"I appeal to the chair! I appeal to the nation!" he gasped. Then he shook his fist at Jack.

"There's no chair—not yet," explained Dennis. "As soon as we decide, I'll take the chair, and we'll appoint a committee to go into the matter and arrange the parts, and so on. The first thing is, are we agreed?"

One loud shout attested to the sense of the meeting.

"Then, Mr. Head, you're in a minority of one, and I hope we may yet convince you that this innocent revival is not a bad thing," said Dennis. "And further than that, you mustn't run down Shaugh Prior in this company. We've got a cheerful conceit of ourselves, and why not? Don't think I'm dead to the dark side of human life, and the sorrows and sufferings of the poor. I hope you'll all very soon find that I'm not that sort, or my sister either. And the devil himself can't hide Shaugh Prior from the Lord and Saviour of us all, Mr. Head — have no fear of that."

"Sit down, Jack, and say you'm sorry," cried Mr. Luscombe.

"Not me," replied Head. "I've stated my views at a free meeting, and I'm on the losing side, like men of my opinions always be where parsons have a voice. But me and my friends will be up top presently."

"Turn him out, Ben North!" shouted Mr. Gollop; but Ben North refused. Indeed, he was of Jack's party.

"He've done nought but say his say, and I shan't turn him out," the policeman answered. "There's nobody in the chair yet, and therefore there's none here with power to command the Law to move."

A committee was swiftly formed. It consisted of

the clergyman and certain parishioners. Nathan joined it for his family; Mr. Luscombe also joined, and Dennis promised that certain local antiquaries and the lord of the manor would assist the enterprise.

"While we are here," he said, "we may as well get the thing well advanced and decide about the characters. All those interested are here, so why not let me read through the old play as it stands? Then we'll settle the parts, and each can copy his or her part in turn."

"There's nothing like being fore-handed," admitted Nathan. "Let's have it by all means. We shall want young and old to play, if my memory serves me."

"We shall, and a good company to sing the songs that I hope to add. My sister, our organist, will undertake the music."

"And right well she'll do it, without a doubt," declared Nathan. "On all hands 'tis admitted how the church music has mended a lot since she took it up."

Mr. Masterman then read a version of the old play, and its ingenuous humour woke laughter.

"Now," said the vicar when his recital was at an end, "I'll ask those among us who will volunteer to act — ladies and gentlemen — to come forward. Especially I appeal to the ladies. They'll have to say very little."

"Only to look nice, and I'm sure that won't cost 'em an effort, for they can't help it," declared Nathan.

None immediately rose. Then Ned Baskerville strolled down the room.

"Best-looking young man in Shaugh," cried an anonymous voice.

"And the laziest!" answered another unknown.

There was a laugh and Ned turned ruddy.

"Thou'lt never take trouble enough to learn thy part, Ned!" cried Heathman Lintern.

"Play Turkish knight, my son," said his father. "Then thou can'st be knocked on the head and die comfortable without more trouble."

Others followed Ned, and Mr. Masterman called for Mark.

"You'll not desert us, Mark? I shall want your help, I know."

"And glad to give it," answered the young man. He grew very hot and nervous to find himself named. His voice broke, he coughed and cut a poor figure. Somebody patted him on the back.

"Don't be frighted, Mark," said Vivian Baskerville; "his reverence only wants for you to do what you can. He wouldn't ask impossibilities."

Mrs. Baskerville compared her handsome son to stammering Mark and felt satisfied. Cora Lintern also contrasted the young men, and in her bosom was anything but satisfaction.

"You needn't act, but you must help in many ways. You're so well up in the old lore — all about our legends and customs," explained the clergyman. "We count on you. And now we want some of the older men among you, and when we've settled them we must come to the ladies. We're getting on splendidly. Now — come — you set a good example, Thomas."

"Me!" cried Mr. Gollop. "Me to play-act! Whoever heard the like?"

"You must play, Thomas," urged Vivian Baskerville of Cadworthy. "Such a voice can't be lost. What a King of Egypt the man will make!"

"I'll do a part if you will, but not else," returned Gollop, and the Baskerville family lifted a laugh at their father's expense.

"For that matter I've took the stage often enough," admitted Vivian; "but 'twas to work, not to talk.

All the same, if his reverence would like for me to play a part, why, I'm ready and willing, so long as there isn't much to say to it."

"Hurrah for Mr. Baskerville!" shouted several present.

"And Mr. Nathan must play, too," declared Joe Voysey. "No revel would be complete without him."

"If you'll listen I'll tell you what I think," said the clergyman. "I've considered your parts during the last five minutes, and they go like this in my mind. Let's take them in order:—

"St. George, Mr. Ned Baskerville. Will you do St. George, Ned?"

"Yes, if you can't find a better," said the young man.

"Good! Now the Turkish knight comes next. He must be young and a bit of a fighter. Will you be Turkish knight, Mr. Waite?"

He addressed a young, good-looking, dark man, who farmed land in the parish, and dwelt a few miles off.

Mr. Waite laughed and nodded.

"Right — I'll try."

"Well done! Now"— Mr. Masterman smiled and looked at Jack Head — "will Mr. Head play the Bear — to oblige us all?"

Everybody laughed, including Jack himself.

"The very living man for Bear!" cried Mr. Luscombe. "I command you, Jack, to be Bear!"

"You ain't got much to do but growl and fight, Jack, and you're a oner at both," said Heathman.

"Well, I've said my say," returned Mr. Head, "and I was in a minority. But since this parish wants for me to be Bear, I'll Bear it out so well as I can; and if I give St. George a bit of a hug afore he bowls me over, he mustn't mind that."

"Capital! Thank you, Jack Head. Now, who'll be Father Christmas? I vote for Mr. Nathan Baskerville."

Applause greeted the suggestion, but Miss Masterman bent over from her seat and whispered to her brother. He shook his head, however, and answered under his breath.

"It doesn't matter a button about his being a dissenter. So much the better. Let's draw them in all we can."

"You ought to choose the church people first."

"It's done now, anyway," he replied. "Everybody likes the man. We must have him in it, or half the folk won't come."

"The King of Egypt is next," said Nathan, after he had been duly elected to Father Christmas. "I say Thomas Gollop here for the part."

"I don't play nought," answered Thomas firmly, "unless Vivian Baskerville do. He's promised."

"I'll be Giant, then, and say 'Fee-fo-fum!'" answered the farmer. "'Twill be a terrible come-along-of-it for Ned here, and I warn him that if he don't fight properly valiant, I won't die."

"The very man — the only man for Giant," declared Dennis Masterman. "So that's settled. Now, who's for Doctor? That's a very important part. I suppose your father wouldn't do it, Mark? He's just the wise-looking face for a doctor."

"My brother!" cried Vivian. "Good Lord! he'd so soon stand on his head in the market-place as lend a hand in a bit of nonsense like this. Ask Luscombe here. Will you be Doctor, Saul?"

But Mr. Luscombe refused.

"Not in my line. Here's Joe Voysey — he's doctored a lot of things in his time — haven't you, Joe?"

"Will you be Doctor, Joe?" asked Mr. Masterman.

But Joe refused.

"Too much to say," he answered. "I might larn it with a bit of sweat, but I should never call it home when the time came."

"Be the French Eagle, Joe," suggested Mark Baskerville. "You've got but little to say, and St. George soon settles you."

"And the very living nose for it, Joe," urged Mr. Gollop.

"Very well, if the meeting is for it, I'll be Eagle," assented Mr. Voysey.

The part of Doctor remained unfilled for the present.

"Now there's the fair Princess Sabra and Mother Dorothy," explained the vicar. "Princess Sabra, the King of Egypt's daughter, will be a novelty, for she didn't come into the old play in person. She doesn't say anything, but she must be there."

"Miss Lintern for Princess Sabra!" said Mark.

Everybody laughed, and the young man came in for some chaff; but Dennis approved, and Mrs. Lintern nodded and smiled. Cora blushed and Nathan patted Mark on the back.

"A good idea, and we're all for it," he said.

To Cora, as the belle of the village, belonged the part by right. She was surprised and gratified at this sudden access of importance.

Then the vicar prepared to close his meeting.

"For Mother Dorothy we want a lady of mature years and experience. The part is often played by a man, but I would sooner a lady played it, if we can persuade one to do so," he said.

"Mrs. Hacker! Mrs. Hacker!" shouted a mischievous young man at the back of the hall.

"Never," said Susan Hacker calmly. "Not that I'd mind; but whatever would my master say?"

"Let my sister play the part," suggested Thomas. "Eliza Gollop fears nought on two legs. She'll go bravely through with it."

Mr. Nathan's heart sank, but he could not object.

The company was divided. Then, to the surprise of not a few, Mrs. Hacker spoke again. The hated name had dispelled her doubts.

"I'll do it, and chance master," she said. "Yes, there's no false shame in me, I believe. I'll do it rather than ——"

"You're made for the part, ma'am," declared Mr. Nathan, much relieved. "And very fine you'll look. You've got to kiss Father Christmas at the end of the play, though. I hope you don't mind that."

"That's why she's going to act the part!" shouted Heathman, and laughter drowned Mrs. Hacker's reply.

In good spirits the company broke up, and the young folk went away excited, the old people interested and amused.

Merriment sounded on the grey July night; many women chattered about the play till long after their usual hour for sleep; and plenty of coarse jests as to the promised entertainment were uttered at the bar of 'The White Thorn' presently.

As for the vicar and his sister, they felt that they had achieved a triumph. Two shadows alone darkened the outlook in Miss Masterman's eyes. She objected to the Nonconformist element as undesirable or unnecessary; and she did not like the introduction of Queen Sabra.

"That showy girl is quite conceited enough already," she said.

But her brother was young and warm-hearted.

"She's lovely, though," he said. "By Jove! the

play will be worth doing, if only to see her got up like a princess ! "

" Don't be silly, Dennis," answered his sister. " She's a rude wretch, and the Linterns are the most independent people in the parish."

CHAPTER IX

AT high summer two men and two maids kept public holiday and wove romance under the great crown of Pen Beacon. From this border height the South Hams spread in a mighty vision of rounded hills and plains; whole forests were reduced to squat, green cushions laid upon the broad earth's bosom; and amid them glimmered wedges and squares of ripening corn, shone root crops, smiled water meadows, and spread the emerald faces of shorn hayfields.

It was a day of lowering clouds and illumination breaking through them. Fans of light fell between the piled-up cumuli, and the earth was mottled with immense, alternate patches of shadow and sunshine. Thick and visible strata of air hung heavy between earth and sky at this early hour. They presaged doubt, and comprehended a condition that might presently diffuse and lift into unclouded glory of August light, or darken to thunderstorm. Southerly the nakedness of Hanger Down and the crags of Eastern and Western Beacons towered; while to the east were Quickbeam Hill, Three Barrows, and the featureless expanses of Stall Moor. Northerly towered Penshiel, and the waste spread beyond it in long leagues, whose planes were flattened out by distance and distinguished against each other by sleeping darkness and waking light.

A fuliginous heaviness, that stained air at earth's surface, persisted even on this lofty ground, and the highest passages of aerial radiance were not about the sun, but far beneath it upon the horizon.

Rupert Baskerville trudged doubtfully forward, sniff-

ing the air and watching the sky, while beside him came Milly Luscombe; and a quarter of a mile behind them walked Mark and Cora Lintern. The men had arranged to spend their holiday up aloft, and Milly was well pleased; but Cora held the expedition vain save for what it should accomplish. To dawdle in the Moor when she might have been at a holiday revel was not her idea of pleasure; but as soon as Mark issued his invitation she guessed that he did so with an object, and promised to join him.

As yet the definite word had not passed his lips, though it had hovered there; but to-day Miss Lintern was resolved to return from Pen Beacon betrothed. As for Mark, his hope chimed with her intention. Cora was always gracious and free of her time, while he played the devout lover and sincerely held her above him every way. Only the week before Heathman, obviously inspired to do so, had asked him why he kept off, and declared that it would better become him to speak. And now, feeling that the meal presently to be taken would be of a more joyous character after than before the deed, he stopped Cora while yet a mile remained to trudge before they should reach the top of the tor.

"Rest a bit," he said. "Let Rupert and Milly go forward. They don't want us, and we shall all meet in the old roundy-poundies up over, where we're going to eat our dinner."

"Looks as if 'twas offering for bad weather," she answered, lifting her eyes to the sky. "I'm glad I didn't put on my new muslin."

She sat on a stone and felt that he was now going to ask her to marry him. She was not enthusiastic about him at the bottom of her heart; but she knew that he would be rich and a good match for a girl in her position. She was prone to exaggerate her beauty,

and had hoped better things from it than Mark Baskerville; but certain minor romances with more important men had come to nothing. She was practical and made herself see the bright side of the contract. He was humble and she could influence him as she pleased. He worshipped her and would doubtless continue to do so.

Once his wife she proposed to waken in him a better conceit of himself and, when his father died, she would be able to 'blossom out,' as she put it to her sister, and hold her head high in the land. There were prospects. Nathan Baskerville was rich also, and he was childless. He liked Mark well, and on one occasion, when she came into the farm kitchen at Undershaugh suddenly, she overheard Nathan say to her mother, "No objection — none at all — a capital match for her."

Mark put down the basket that carried their meal and took a seat beside Cora.

"'Tisn't going to rain," he said. "I always know by my head if there's thunder in the elements. It gets a sort of heavy, aching feeling. Look yonder, the clouds are levelling off above the Moor so true as if they'd been planed. That's the wind's work. Why, there's enough blue showing to make you a new dress a'ready, Cora."

"I'd love a dress of such blue as that. Blue's my colour," she said.

"Yes, it is — though you look lovely enough in any colour."

"I like to please you, Mark."

"Oh, Cora, and don't you please me? Little you know — little you know. I've had it on my tongue a thousand times — yet it seems too bold — from such as me to you. Why, there's none you mightn't look to; and if you'd come of a higher havage, you'd have been among the loveliest ladies in the land. And so you are

now, for that matter—only you're hid away in this savage old place—like a beautiful pearl under the wild sea."

This had long been Cora's own opinion. She smiled and touched the hair on her hot forehead.

"If there comes on a fog, I shall go out of curl in a minute," she said. Then, seeing that this prophecy silenced him, she spoke again.

"I love to hear you tell these kind things, Mark. I'd sooner please you than any man living. Perhaps 'tis over-bold in me to say so; but I'm telling nought but truth."

"Truth ban't often so beautiful as that," he said slowly. "And 'tis like your brave heart to say it out; and here's truth for your truth, Cora. If you care to hear me say I think well of you, then I care to hear you speak well of me; and more: nobody else's good word is better than wind in the trees against your slightest whisper. So that I please you, I care nothing for all the world; and if you'll let me, I'll live for you and die for you. For that matter I've lived for only you these many days, and if you'll marry me—there—'tis out. I'm a vain chap even to dare to say it; but 'tis you have made me so—'tis your kind words and thoughts for me—little thoughts that peep out and dear little kind things done by you and forgotten by you; but never by me, Cora. Can you do it? Can you sink down to me, or is it too much of a drop? Others have lowered themselves for love and never regretted it. 'Tis a fall for such a bright, lovely star as you; but my love's ready to catch you, so you shan't hurt yourself. I—I——"

He broke off and she seemed really moved. She put her hand on his two, which were knotted together; and then she looked love into his straining eyes and nodded.

His hands opened and seized hers and squeezed them till she drew in her breath. Then he put his arms round her and kissed her.

"Don't move, for God's sake!" he said. "D'you know what you've done?"

"Given myself to a dear good chap," she answered.

In her heart she was thanking heaven that she had not worn the new muslin dress.

"Weather or no weather, he'd have creased it and mangled it all over and ruined it for ever," she thought.

They proceeded presently, but made no haste to overtake their companions. Their talk was of the future and marriage. He pressed for an early union; she was in no hurry.

"You must learn a bit more about me first," she told him. "Maybe I'm not half as nice as you think. And there's your father. I'm terrible frightened of him."

"You need not be, Cora. He's not against early marriage. You must come and see him pretty soon. He'll be right glad for my sake, though he'll be sure to tell me I've had better luck than I deserve."

She considered awhile without speaking.

"I'm afraid I shan't bring you much money," she said.

"What's money? That's the least thing. I shall have plenty enough, no doubt."

"What will your father do? Then there's your uncle, Mr. Nathan. He's terrible rich, by all accounts, and he thinks very well of you."

"I shall be all right. But I'm a lazy man — too lazy. I shall turn my hand to something steady when we're married."

"Such a dreamer you are. Not but what, with all your great cleverness, you ban't worth all the young men put together for brains."

"I'm going to set to. My father's often at me

about wasting my life. But, though he'd scorn the word, he's a bit of a dreamer too — in his way. You'd never guess it; but he spends many long hours all alone, brooding about things. And he's a very sharp-eyed, clever man. He marks the seasons by the things that happen out of doors. He'll come down off our tor that cheerful sometimes, you wouldn't believe 'twas him. 'Curlew's back on the Moor,' he'll say one day; then another day, 'Oaks are budding'; then again, 'First frost to-night,' or 'Thunder's coming.' His bark is worse than his bite, really."

"'Tis his terrible eyes I fear. They look through you. He makes me feel small, and I always hate anybody that does that."

"You mustn't hate him. Too many do already. But 'twould be better to feel sorry for him. He's often a very unhappy old man. I feel it, but I can't see the reason, and he says nothing."

She pouted.

"I wish I hadn't got to see him. Why, his own brother — your Uncle Nathan — even he can't hit it off with him. And I'm sure there must be something wrong with a man that can't get on with Mr. Nathan. Everybody is fond of him; but I've often heard him say ——"

"Leave it," interrupted Mark. "I know all that, Cora. 'Tis just one of those puzzles that happen. 'Tis no good fretting about anybody else: what you've got to do is to make my father love you. And you've only got to be yourself and he must love you."

"Of course I'll do my best."

"Give me just one more lovely kiss, before we get over the hill-top and come in sight of them. We're to meet at the 'old men's' camp."

She kissed him and then silence fell between them. It lasted a long while until he broke it.

"Don't fancy because I'm so still that I'm not bursting with joy," he said. "But when I think of what's happened to me this minute, I feel 'tis too big for words. The thoughts in me can't be spoken, Cora. They are too large to cram into little pitiful speeches."

"I'm getting hungry; and there's Milly waving," she answered.

"Milly's hungry too, belike."

Eastward, under Pen Beacon, lay an ancient lodge of the neolithic people. The circles of scattered granite shone grey, set in foliage and fruit of the bilberry, with lichens on the stone and mosses woven into the grass about them. A semicircle of hills extended beyond and formed a mighty theatre where dawn and storm played their parts, where falling night was pictured largely and moonshine slept upon lonely heights and valleys. In the glen beneath spread Dendles Wood, with fringes of larch and pine hiding the River Yealm and spreading a verdant medley of deep summer green in the lap of the grey hills. Gold autumn furzes flashed along the waste, and the pink ling broke into her first tremble of colourless light that precedes the blush of fulness.

The party of four sat in a hut circle and spoke little while they ate and drank. Rupert, unknown to the rest, and much to his own inconvenience, had dragged up six stone bottles of ginger-beer hidden under his coat. These he produced and was much applauded. A spring broke at hand, and the bottles were sunk therein to cool them.

They talked together after a very practical and businesslike fashion. Milly and Rupert were definitely engaged in their own opinion, and now when Mark, who could not keep in the stupendous event

of the moment, announced it, they congratulated the newly engaged couple with the wisdom and experience of those who had long entered that state.

"'Tis a devilish unrestful condition, I can promise you," said Rupert, "and the man always finds it so if the girl don't. Hanging on is just hell — especially in my case, where I can't get father to see with my eyes. But, thank God, Milly's jonic. She won't change."

"No," said Milly, "I shan't change. 'Tis you have got to change. I respect your father very much, like the rest of the world, but because he didn't marry till he was turned forty-five, that's no reason why you should wait twenty years for it. Anyway, if you must, so will I — only I shall be a thought elderly for the business by that time. However, it rests with you."

"I'm going — that's what she means," explained Rupert. "Jack Head and me have had a talk, and he's thrown a lot of light on things in general. I can't be bound hand and foot to my father like this; and if he won't meet me, I must take things into my own hands and leave home."

Mark was staggered at the enormity of such a plan.

"Don't do anything in a hurry and without due thought."

"Very well for you to talk," said Milly. "You do nought but ring the bells on Sundays, and play at work the rest of the week. Mr. Humphrey won't stand in your way. I suppose you could be married afore Christmas, if you pleased."

She sighed at the glorious possibility.

"I hope we shall be; but Cora's in no hurry, I'm afraid."

"And when I've got work," continued Rupert, "then I shall just look round and take a house and marry; and why not?"

"Your father will never let you go. It isn't to be thought upon," declared Mark.

"Then he must be reasonable. He appears to forget I'm nearly twenty-four," answered his cousin.

Conversation ranged over their problems and their hopes. Then Rupert touched another matrimonial disappointment.

"It looks as if we were not to be fortunate in love," he said. "There's Ned terrible down on his luck. He's offered marriage again — to Farmer Chave's second daughter; and 'twas as good as done; but Mr. Chave wouldn't hear of it, and he's talked the girl round and Ned's got chucked."

"Serve him right," said Milly. "He jilted two girls. 'Twill do him good to smart a bit himself."

"The Chaves are a lot too high for us," asserted Mark. "He's a very well-born and rich man, and his father was a Justice of the Peace, and known in London. He only farms to amuse himself."

"'Twas Ned's face, I reckon," said Cora. "They Chave women are both terrible stuck up. Makes me sick to see 'em in church all in their town-made clothes. But fine feathers won't make fine birds of them. They'm both flat as a plate, and a lot older than they pretend. Ned is well out of it, I reckon."

"He don't think so, however," replied Rupert. "I've never known him take any of his affairs to heart like this one. Moped and gallied he is, and creeps about with a face as long as a fiddle; and off his food too."

"Poor chap," said Cora feelingly.

"Even talks of ending it and making away with himself. Terrible hard hit, I do believe."

"Your mother must be in a bad way about him," said Milly.

"She is. Why, he took mother down to the river

last Sunday and showed her a big hole there, where Plym comes over the rocks and the waters all a-boil and twelve feet deep. 'That's where you'll find me, mother,' he says. And she, poor soul, was frightened out of her wits. And father's worried too, for Ned can't go wrong with him. Ned may always do what he likes, though I may not."

Cora declared her sympathy, but Mark did not take the incident as grave.

"You needn't fear," he assured Ned's brother. "Men that talk openly of killing themselves, never do it. Words are a safety-valve. 'Tis the sort that go silent and cheerful under a great blow that be nearest death."

Cora spoke of Ned's looks with admiration and feared that this great disappointment might spoil them; but Milly was not so sympathetic.

"If he stood to work and didn't think so much about the maidens, they might think a bit more about him," she said.

"He swears he won't play St. George now," added Rupert. "He haven't got the heart to go play-acting no more."

"He'll find twenty girls to go philandering after afore winter," foretold Milly. "And if Cora here was to ask him, he'd play St. George fast enough."

"'Twill be a very poor compliment to me if he cries off now," declared Cora. "For I'm to be the princess, and 'tis pretended in the play that he's my true lover."

"Mark will be jealous then. 'Tis a pity he don't play St. George," said Milly.

But Mark laughed.

"A pretty St. George me!" he answered. "No, no; I'm not jealous of Ned. Safety in numbers, they say. Let him be St. George and welcome;

and very noble he'll look — if ever he's got brains enough in his empty noddle to get the words and remember them."

Cora cast a swift side glance at her betrothed. She did not speak, but the look was not all love. Discontent haunted her for a little space.

The ginger-beer was drunk and the repast finished. The men lighted their pipes; the girls talked together.

Milly congratulated Cora very heartily.

"He's a fine, witty chap, as I've always said. Different to most of us, along of being better eggicated. But that modest and retiring, few people know what a clever man he is."

These things pleased the other, and she was still more pleased when Milly discussed Mark's father.

"I often see him," she said — "oftener than you might think for. He'll ride to Trowlesworthy twice and thrice a month sometimes. Why for? To see my uncle, you might fancy. But that's not the reason. To talk with Jack he comes. Jack Head and me be the only people in these parts that ban't afraid of him. And that's what he likes. You be fearless of him, Cora, or he'll think nought of thee. Fearless and attentive to what he says — that's the rule with him. And pretend nothing, or he'll see through it and pull you to pieces. Him and Jack Head says the most tremendous things about the world and its ways. They take Uncle Saul's breath away sometimes, and mine too. But don't let him frighten you — that's the fatal thing. If a creature's feared of him, he despises it. Never look surprised at his speeches."

Cora listened to this advice and thanked the other girl for it.

"Why should I care a button for the old man, anyway?" she asked. "If it comes to that, I'm as good

as him. There's nought to fear really, when all's said. And I won't fear."

The men strolled about the old village and gathered whortleberries; then Rupert judged that the storm that had skulked so long to the north, was coming at last.

"We'd best be getting down-along," he said. "Let's go across to Trowlesworthy; then, if it breaks, we can slip into the warren house a bit till the worst be over."

"You be all coming to drink tea there," said Milly. "Uncle Saul and Jack Head are away, but aunt be home, and I made the cakes specially o' Saturday."

Drifting apart by a half a mile or so, the young couples left the Beacon, climbed Penshiel, and thence passed over the waste to where the red tor rose above Milly Luscombe's home.

A sort of twilight stole at four o'clock over the earth, and it seemed that night hastened up while yet the hidden sun was high. The sinister sky darkened and frowned to bursting; yet no rain fell, and later it grew light again, as the sun, sinking beneath the ridges of the clouds, flooded the Moor with the greatest brightness that the day had known.

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CHAPTER X

SOME few weeks after it was known that young Mark Baskerville would marry Cora Lintern, a small company drank beer at 'The White Thorn' and discussed local politics in general, and the engagement in particular. The time was three in the afternoon.

"They'll look to you for a wedding present without a doubt," said Mr. Gollop to Nathan, who stood behind his bar.

"And they'll be right," answered the innkeeper. "I'm very fond of 'em both."

"You'll be put to it to find rich gifts for all your young people, however."

"That's as may be. If the Lord don't send you sons, the Devil will send you nephews — you know the old saying. Not but what Vivian's boys and girls are a very nice lot — I like 'em all very well indeed. Mark's different — clever enough, but made of another clay. His mother was a retiring, humble woman — frightened of her own shadow, you might say. However, Cora will wake him into a cheerfuller conceit of himself."

There was an interruption, for Dennis Masterman suddenly filled the doorway.

"The very men I want," he said; then he entered.

"Fine sweltering weather for the harvest, your honour," piped an old fellow who sat on a settle by the window with a mug of beer beside him.

"So it is, Abel, and I hope there's another month of it to come. Give me half a pint of the mild, will you,

Baskerville? 'Tis about the rehearsal I've looked in. Thursday week is the day — at seven o'clock sharp, remember. And I'm very anxious that everybody shall know their words. It will save a lot of trouble and help us on."

"I've got mine very near," said Nathan.

"So have I," declared Mr. Gollop. "'Here I, the King of Egypt, boldly do appear; St. Garge, St. Garge, walk in, my only son and heir!'"

"Yes, but you mustn't say '*h*eir'; the *h* isn't sounded, you know. Has anybody seen Ned Baskerville? I heard that he was in trouble."

"Not at all," said Nathan. "He's all right — a lazy rascal. 'Twas only another of his silly bits of work with the girls. Running after Mr. Chave's daughter. Like his cheek!"

Mr. Masterman looked astonished.

"I thought Mr. Chave ——" he said.

"Exactly, vicar; you thought right. 'Tis just his handsome face makes my nephew so pushing. We be a yeoman race, we Baskervilles, though said to be higher once; but of course, as things are, Ned looking there was just infernal impudence, though his good old pig-headed father, my brother, couldn't see it. He's only blind when Ned's the matter."

"'Twas said he was going to jump in the river," declared the ancient Abel.

"Nonsense and rubbish!" declared Nathan. "Ned's not that sort. Wait till he sees himself in the glittering armour of St. George, and he'll soon forget his troubles."

"We must talk about the dresses after rehearsal. A good many can be made at home."

"Be you going to charge at the doors?" asked Mr. Gollop. "I don't see why for we shouldn't."

"Yes, certainly I am," answered Dennis. "The

money will go to rehanging the bells. That's settled. Well, remember. And stir up Joe Voysey, Thomas. You can do anything with him, but I can't. Remind him about the French Eagle. He's only got to learn six lines, but he says it makes his head ache so badly that he's sure he'll never do it."

"I'll try and fire the man's pride," declared Mr. Gollop. "Joe's not a day over sixty-eight, and he's got a very fair share of intellect. He shall learn it, if I've got to teach him."

"That's right. Now I must be off."

When the vicar was gone Gollop reviewed the situation created by young Masterman's energy and tact.

"I never could have foreseen it, yet the people somehow make shift to do with him. It don't say much for him, but it says a lot for us — for our sense and patience. We'm always ready to lend the man a hand in reason, and I wish he was more grateful; but I shouldn't call him a grateful man. Of course, this here play-acting will draw the eyes of the country on us, and he'll get the credit, no doubt; yet 'twill be us two men here in this bar — me and you, Nathan — as will make or mar all."

"I'm very glad to help him. He's a good chap, and my sort. Lots of fun in the man when you know him."

"Can't say I look at him like that. He's not enough beholden to the past, in my opinion. However, I believe he's woke up a bit to who I am and what my sister is," answered Gollop.

"Not your fault if he hasn't."

"And another thing — he don't take himself seriously enough," continued the parish clerk. "As a man I grant you he has got nought to take seriously. He's young, and he's riddled with evil, modern ideas that would land the country in ruin if followed. But,

apart from that, as a minister he ought to be different. I hate to see him running after the ball at cricket, like a school-child. 'Tisn't decent, and it lessens the force of the man in the pulpit come Sunday, just as it lessened the force of physician Dawe to Tavistock when he took to singing comic songs at the penny readings. Why, 'twas money out of the doctor's pocket, as he lived to find out, too late. When Old Master Trelawny lay dying, and they axed un to let Dawe have a slap at un, he wouldn't do it. 'Be that the man that sang the song about locking his mother-in-law into the coal-cellar?' he axed. 'The same,' said they; 'but he's a terrible clever chap at the stomach, and may save you yet if there be enough of your organs left for him to work upon.' 'No, no,' says old Trelawny. 'Such a light-minded feller as that couldn't be trusted with a dying man's belly.' I don't say 'twas altogether reasonable, because the wisest must unbend the bow now and again; but I will maintain that that minister of the Lord didn't ought to take off his coat and get in a common sweat afore the people assembled at a cricket match. 'Tis worse than David making a circus of himself afore the holy ark; and if he does so, he must take the consequences."

"The consequences be that everybody will think a lot better of him, as a manly and sensible chap, wishful to help the young men," declared Mr. Baskerville. "One thing I can bear witness to: I don't get the Saturday custom I used to get, and that's to the good, anyway." Then he looked at his watch and changed the subject.

"Mrs. Lintern's daughter is paying a sort of solemn visit to my brother to-day, and they are all a little nervous about it."

"He'll terrify her out of her wits," said Mr. Gollop. "He takes a dark delight in scaring the young people."

"'Tisn't that, 'tis his manner. He don't mean to hurt 'em. A difficult man, however, as I know only too well."

"If he can't get on with you, there's a screw loose in him," remarked the old man, sitting on the settle.

"I won't say that, Abel; but I don't know why 'tis that he's got no use for me."

"No loss, however," asserted Thomas. "A cranky and heartless creature. The likes of him couldn't neighbour with the likes of us — not enough human kindness in him."

"Like our father afore him, and yet harder," explained the publican. "I can see my parent now — dark and grim, and awful old to my young eyes. Well I remember the first time I felt the sting of him. A terrible small boy I was — hadn't cast my short frocks, I believe — but I'd sinned in some little matter, and he give me my first flogging. And the picture I've got of father be a man with a hard, set face, with a bit of a grim smile on it, and his right hand hidden behind him. But I knowed what was in it! A great believer in the rod. He beat us often — all three of us — till we'd wriggle and twine like a worm on a hook; but our uncle, the musicker, he was as different as you please — soft and gentle, like my nephew Mark, and all for spoiling childer with sweeties and toys."

Mr. Gollop rose to depart, and others entered. Then Nathan called a pot-man and left the bar.

"I promised Mrs. Lintern as I'd go down to hear what Cora had to say," he explained. "I'm very hopeful that she's had the art to win Humphrey, for 'twill smooth the future a good bit for the people at Undershaugh if my brother takes to the wench. You'd think nobody could help it — such a lovely face as she has. However, we shall know how it fell out inside an hour or so."

Meanwhile Cora, clad in her new muslin, had faced Humphrey Baskerville, and faced him alone. For her future father-in-law expressly wished this, and Mark was from home on the occasion of his sweetheart's visit. Cora arrived twenty minutes before dinner, and watched Susan Hacker dish it up. She had even offered to assist, but Susan would not permit it.

"Better you go into the parlour and keep cool, my dear," she said. "You'll need to be. Master's not in the best of tempers to-day. And your young man left a message. He be gone to Plympton, and will be back by four o'clock; so, when you take your leave, you are to go down the Rut and meet him at Torry Brook stepping-stones, if you please."

"Where's Mr. Baskerville?"

"Taking the air up 'pon top the tor. He bides there most mornings till the dinner hour, and he'd forget his meal altogether so often as not, but I go to the hedge and ring the dinner bell. Then he comes down."

"How can I best please him, Susan?"

"By listening first, and by talking afterwards. He don't like a chatterbox, but he don't like young folk to be too silent neither. 'Twill be a hugeous heave-up of luck if you can get on his blind side. Few can — I warn you of that. He's very fond of natural, wild things. If you was to talk about the flowers and show him you be fond of nature, it might be well. However, do as you will, he'll find out the truth of 'e."

"I'm all of a tremor. I wish you hadn't told me that."

"Mark might have told you. Still, for your comfort it may be said you're built the right way. You'll be near so full-blown as I be, come you pass fifty. He hates the pinikin,[1] pin-tailed sort. Be cheerful,

[1] *Pinikin* — delicate.

eat hearty, don't leave nothing on your plate, and wait for him to say grace afore and after meat. The rest must fall out according to your own sense and wit. Now I be going to ring the bell."

"I half thought that he might come part of the way to meet me."

"You thought wrong, then. He don't do that sort of thing."

"I wish Mark was here, Susan."

"So does Mark. But master has his own way of doing things, and 'tis generally the last way that other people would use."

Mrs. Hacker rang the bell, and the thin, black figure of Humphrey Baskerville appeared and began to creep down the side of the hill. He had, of course, met Cora on previous occasions, but this was the first time that he had spoken with the girl since her betrothal.

He shook hands and hoped that her mother was well.

"A harvest to make up for last year," he said. "You ought to be lending a hand by rights."

"I don't think Mr. Baskerville would like for Polly and me to do that. 'Tis too hot," she said.

"Nathan wouldn't? Surely he would. Many hands make light work and save the time. You're a strong girl, aren't you?"

"Strong as a pony, sir."

"Don't call me 'sir.' And you're fond of wild nature and the country — so Mark tells me."

"That I am, and the wild flowers."

"Why didn't you wear a bunch of 'em then? Better them than that davered[1] rose stuck in your belt. Gold by the look of it — the belt I mean."

She laughed.

"I'll let you into the secret," she said. "I wanted to be smart to-day, and so I took one of my treasures.

[1] *Davered* — withered.

You'll never guess where this gold belt came from, Mr. Baskerville?"

"Don't like it, anyway," he answered.

"Why, 'twas the hat-band round my grandfather's hat! He was a beadle up to some place nigh London; and 'twas an heirloom when he died; and mother gived it to me, and here it is."

He regarded the relic curiously.

"A funny world, to be sure," he said. "Little did that bygone man think of such a thing when he put his braided hat on his head, I'll warrant."

He relapsed into a long silence, and Cora's remarks were rewarded with no more than nods of affirmation or negation. Then, suddenly, he broke out on the subject of apparel long after she thought that he had forgotten it.

"Terrible tearing fine I suppose you think your clothes are, young woman — terrible tearing fine; but I hate 'em, and they ill become a poor man's wife and a poor man's daughter. My mother wore her hair frapped back light and plain, with a forehead cloth, and a little blue baize rochet over her breast, and a blue apron and short gown and hob-nailed shoon; and she looked ten thousand times finer than ever you looked in your life — or ever can in that piebald flimsy, with those Godless smashed birds on your head. What care you for nature to put a bit of a dead creature 'pon top of your hair? A nasty fashion, and I'm sorry you follow it."

She kept her temper well under this terrific onslaught.

"We must follow the fashion, Mr. Baskerville. But I'll not wear this hat again afore you, since you don't like it."

"Going to be married and live up to your knees in clover, eh? So you both think. Now tell me what you feel like to my son, please."

"I love him dearly, I'm sure, and I think he's a very clever chap, and quite the gentleman in all his ways. Though he might dress a bit smarter, and not be so friendly with the other bellringers. Because they are commoner men than him, of course."

"'Quite the gentleman'—eh? What's a gentleman?"

"Oh, dear, Mr. Baskerville, you'll spoil my dinner with such a lot of questions. To be a gentleman is to be like Mark, I suppose—kind and quick to see what a girl wants; and to be handsome and be well thought of by everybody, and all the rest of it."

"You go a bit too high at instep," he said. "You're too vain of your pretty face, and you answer rather pertly. You don't know what a gentleman is, for all you think yourself a fine lady. And I'll tell you this: very few people do know what a gentleman is. You can tell a lot about people by hearing them answer when you ask them what a gentleman is. Where would you like to live?"

"Where 'twould please Mark best. And if the things I say offend you, I'm sorry for it. You must make allowances, Mr. Baskerville. I'm young, and I've not got much sense yet; but I want to please you—I want to please everybody, for that matter."

This last remark much interested her listener. He started and looked at the girl fixedly. Then his expression changed, and he appeared to stare through her at somebody or something beyond. Behind Cora the old man did, indeed, see another very clearly in his mind's eye.

After a painful silence she spoke again, and her tone was troubled.

"I want to say the thing that will please you, if I can. But I must be myself. I'm sorry if you don't like me."

"You must be yourself, and so must I," he answered; "and if I'm not liking you, you're loathing me. But we're getting through our dinner very nicely. Will you have any more of this cherry tart?"

"No, I've done well."

"You've eaten nought to name. I've spoiled your appetite, and you — well, you've done more than you think, and taught me more than you know yourself."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Mark says puzzling things like that sometimes."

There was another silence.

"You ride a pony, don't you?" he asked presently; and the girl brightened up. Mr. Baskerville possessed some of the best ponies on Dartmoor, and sold a noted strain of his own raising.

"He's going to make it up with a pony!" thought sanguine Cora.

"I do. I'm very fond of riding."

"Like it better than walking, I dare say?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you'd like driving better still, perhaps?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"What are the strangles?" he asked suddenly and grimly.

"It's something the ponies get the matter with them."

"Of course; but what is it? How does it come, and why? Is it infectious? Is it ever fatal to them?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know nothing about things like that."

"No use having a pony if you don't understand it. The strangles are infectious and sometimes fatal. Don't forget that."

Cora felt her temper struggling to break loose. She poured out a glass of water.

"I promise not to forget it," she answered. "Shall I put the cheese on the table for you?"

"No, I thank you — unless you'll eat some."

"Nothing more, I'm sure."

"We'll walk out in the air, then. With your love of nature, you'll like the growing things up on top of my hill. Mark will be back for tea, I think. But maybe you'll not stop quite so long as that."

"I'll stop just as long as you like," she said. "But I don't want to tire you."

"You've got your mother's patience, and plenty of it, I see. That's a good mark for you. Patience goes a long way. You can keep your temper, too — well for you that you can. Though whether 'tis nature or art in you ——"

He broke off and she followed him out of doors.

Upon the tor he asked her many things concerning the clouds above them, the cries of the birds, and the names of the flowers. The ordeal proved terrible, because her ignorance of these matters was almost absolute. At last, unable to endure more, she fled from him, pleaded a sudden recollection of an engagement for the afternoon, and hastened homeward as fast as she could walk. Once out of sight of the old man she slowed down, and her wrongs and affronts crowded upon her and made her bosom pant. She clenched her hands and bit her handkerchief. She desired to weep, but intended that others should see her tears. Therefore she controlled them until she reached home, and then she cried copiously in the presence of her mother, her sister, and Nathan Baskerville, who had come to learn of her success.

The directions of Mark, to meet him at Torry stepping-stones, Cora had entirely forgotten. Nor would she have kept the appointment had she remembered it. In her storm of passion she hated even Mark for being his father's son.

Nathan was indignant at the recital, and Mrs. Lintern showed sorrow, but not surprise.

"'Twas bound to be difficult," she said. "He sent Mark away, you see. He meant to get to the bottom of her."

"A very wanton, unmanly thing," declared Nathan. "I'm ashamed of him."

"Don't you take it too much to heart," answered the mother. "Maybe he thought better of Cora than he seemed to do. He's always harsh and hard like that to young people; but it means nought. I believe that Cora's a bit frightened, that's all."

"We must see him," said Nathan. "At least, I must. I make this my affair."

"'Twill be better for me to do so."

"I tried that hard to please the man," sobbed Cora; "but he looked me through — tore me to pieces with his eyes like a savage dog. Nothing was right from my head to my heels. Flouted my clothes — flouted my talk — was angered, seemingly, because I couldn't tell him how to cure a pony of strangles — wanted me to tell the name of every bird on the bough, and weed in the gutter. And not a spark of hope or kindness from first to last. He did say that I'd got my mother's patience, and that's the only pat on the back he gave me. Patient! I could have sclowed his ugly face down with my nails!"

Her mother stroked her shoulder.

"Hush!" she said. "Don't take on about it. We shall hear what Mark has got to tell."

"I don't care what he's got to tell. I'm not going to be scared out of my life, and bullied and trampled on by that old beast!"

"No more you shall be," cried Nathan. "He'll say 'tis no business of mine, but everything to do with Undershaugh is my business. I'll see him.

He's always hard on me; now I'll be hard on him and learn him how to treat a woman."

"Don't go in heat," urged Mrs. Lintern after Cora had departed with the sympathetic Phyllis. "There's another side, you know. Cora's not his sort. No doubt her fine clothes — she would go in 'em, though I advised her not — no doubt they made him cranky; and then things went from bad to worse."

"'Tis not a bit of use talking to me, Hester. I'm angered, and naturally angered. In a way this was meant to anger me, I'm afraid. He well knows how much you all at Undershaugh are to me. 'Twas to make me feel small, as much as anything, that he snubbed her so cruel. No — I'll not hear you on the subject — not now. I'll see him to-day."

"I shouldn't — wiser far to wait till you are cool. He'll be more reasonable too, to-morrow, when he's forgotten a little."

"What is there to forget? The prettiest and cleverest girl in Shaugh — or in the county, for that matter. Don't stop me. I'm going this instant."

"It's dangerous, Nat. He'll only tell you to mind your own business."

"No, he won't. Even he can't tax me with not doing that. Everything is my business, if I choose to make it so. Anyway, all at Undershaugh are my business."

He left her; but by the time he arrived at Beatland Corner, on the way to Hawk House, Nathan Baskerville had changed his mind. Another aspect of the case suddenly presented itself to him, and, as he grew calmer, he decided to keep out of this quarrel, though natural instincts drew him into it.

A few moments later, as thought progressed with him, he found himself wishing that Humphrey would die. But the desire neither surprised nor shocked him,

for he had often wished it before. Humphrey's life was of no apparent service to Humphrey, while to certain other people it could only be regarded in the light of a hindrance.

CHAPTER XI

SOME days later Mark Baskerville spoke with Mrs. Lintern, and she was relieved to find that Cora's fears had been exaggerated.

"He said very little indeed about her, except that he didn't like her clothes and that she had a poor appetite," explained Mark. "Of course, I asked him a thousand questions, but he wouldn't answer them. I don't think he knows in the least how he flustered Cora. He said one queer thing that I couldn't see sense in, though perhaps you may. He said, 'She's told me more about herself than she knows herself — and more than I'll tell again — even to you, though some might think it a reason against her.' Whatever did he mean by that? But it don't much matter, anyway, and my Cora's quite wrong to think she was a failure or anything of that kind. He asked only this morning, as natural as possible, when she was coming over again."

These statements satisfied the girl's mother, but they failed to calm Cora herself. She took the matter much to heart, caused her lover many unquiet and anxious hours, and refused point-blank for the present to see Mr. Baskerville.

Then fell the great first rehearsal of the Christmas play, and Dennis Masterman found that he had been wise to take time by the forelock in this matter. The mummers assembled in the parish room, and the vicar and his sister, with Nathan Baskerville's assistance, strove to lead them through the drama.

"It's not going to be quite like the version that a

kind friend has sent me, and from which your parts are written," explained Dennis. "I've arranged for an introduction in the shape of a prologue. I shall do this myself, and appear before the curtain and speak a speech to explain what it is all about. This answers Mr. Waite here, who is going to be the Turkish Knight. He didn't want to begin the piece. Now I shall have broken the ice, and then he will be discovered as the curtain rises."

Mr. Timothy Waite on this occasion, however, began proceedings, as the vicar's prologue was not yet written. He proved letter-perfect but exceedingly nervous.

> "Open your doors and let me in,
> I hope your favours I shall win.
> Whether I rise or whether I fall,
> I'll do my best to please you all!"

Mr. Waite spoke jerkily, and his voice proved a little out of control, but everybody congratulated him.

"How he rolls his eyes to be sure," said Vivian Baskerville. "A very daps of a Turk, for sartain."

"You ought to stride about more, Waite," suggested Ned Baskerville, who had cheered up of recent days, and was now standing beside Cora and other girls destined to assist the play. "The great thing is to stride about and look alive — isn't it, Mr. Masterman?"

"We'll talk afterwards," answered Dennis. "We mustn't interfere with the action. You have got your speech off very well, Waite, but you said it much too fast. We must be slow and distinct, so that not a word is missed."

Timothy, who enjoyed the praise of his friends, liked this censure less.

"As for speaking fast," he said, "the man would

speak fast. Because he expects St. George will be on his tail in a minute. He says, 'I know he'll pierce my skin.' In fact, he's pretty well sweating with terror from the first moment he comes on the stage, I should reckon."

But Mr. Masterman was unprepared for any such subtle rendering of the Turkish Knight, and he only hoped that the more ancient play-actors would not come armed with equally obstinate opinions.

"We'll talk about it afterwards," he said. "Now you go off to the right, Waite, and Father Christmas comes on at the left. Mr. Baskerville — Father Christmas, please."

Nathan put his part into his pocket, marched on to the imaginary stage and bowed. Everybody cheered.

"You needn't bow," explained Dennis; but the innkeeper differed from him.

"I'm afraid I must, your reverence. When I appear before them, the people will give me a lot of applause in their usual kindly fashion. Why, even these here — just t'other actors do, you see — so you may be sure that the countryside will. Therefore I had better practise the bow at rehearsal, if you've no great argument against it."

"All right, push on," said Dennis.

"We must really be quicker," declared Miss Masterman. "Half an hour has gone, and we've hardly started."

"Off I go then; and I want you chaps — especially you, Vivian, and you, Jack Head, and you, Tom Gollop — to watch me acting. Acting ban't the same as ordinary talking. If I was just talking, I should say all quiet, without flinging my arms about, and walking round, and stopping, and then away again. But in acting you do all these things, and instead of merely saying your speeches, as we would, just man to

man, over my bar or in the street, you have to bawl 'em out so that every soul in the audience catches 'em."

Having thus explained his theory of histrionics Mr. Baskerville started, and with immense and original emphasis, and sudden actions and gestures, introduced himself.

> "Here come I, the dear old Father Christmas.
> Welcome or welcome not,
> I hope old Father Christmas
> Will never be forgot.
> A room — make room here, gallant boys,
> And give us room to rhyme ——"

Nathan broke off to explain his reading of the part.

"When I say 'make room' I fly all round the stage, as if I was pushing the people back to give me room."

He finished his speech, and panted and mopped his head.

"That's acting, and what d'you think of it?" he asked.

They all applauded vigorously excepting Mr. Gollop, who now prepared to take his part.

Nathan then left the stage and the vicar called him back.

"You don't go off," he explained. "You stop to welcome the King of Egypt."

"Beg pardon," answered the innkeeper. "But of course, so it is. I'll take my stand here."

"You bow to the King of Egypt when he comes on," declared Gollop. "He humbly bows to me, don't he, reverend Masterman?"

"Yes," said Dennis, "he bows, of course. You'll have a train carried by two boys, Gollop; but the boys aren't here to-night, as they're both down with measles — Mrs. Bassett's youngsters."

"I'll bow to you if you bow to me, Tom," said Mr. Baskerville. "That's only right."

"Kings don't bow to common people," declared the parish clerk. "Me and my pretended darter — that's Miss Cora Lintern, who's the Princess — ban't going to bow, I should hope."

"You ought to, then," declared Jack Head. "No reason because you'm King of Egypt why you should think yourself better than other folk. Make him bow, Nathan. Don't you bow to him if he don't bow to you."

"Kings do bow," declared Dennis. "You must bow to Father Christmas, Gollop."

"He must bow first, then," argued the parish clerk.

"Damn the man! turn him out and let somebody else do it!" cried Head.

"Let neither of 'em bow," suggested Mrs. Hacker suddenly. "With all this here bowing and scraping, us shan't be done afore midnight; and I don't come in the play till the end of all things as 'tis."

"You'd better decide, your reverence," suggested Vivian. "Your word's law. I say let 'em bow simultaneous — how would that serve?"

"Excellent!" declared Dennis. "You'll bow together, please. Now, Mr. Gollop."

Thomas marched on with an amazing gait, designed to be regal.

"They'll all laugh if you do it like that, Tom," complained Mr. Voysey.

"Beggar the man! And why for shouldn't they laugh?" asked Jack Head. "Thomas don't want to make 'em cry, do he? Ban't we all to be as funny as ever we can, reverend Masterman?"

"Yes," said Dennis. "In reason — in reason, Jack. But acting is one thing, and playing the fool is another."

"Oh, Lord! I thought they was the same," declared

Vivian Baskerville. "Because if I've got to act the giant——"

"Order! order!" cried the clergyman. "We *must* get on. Don't be annoyed, Mr. Baskerville, I quite see your point; but it will all come right at rehearsal."

"You'll have to tell me how to act then," said Vivian. "How the mischief can a man pretend to be what he isn't? A giant——"

"You're as near being a live giant as you can be," declared Nathan. "You've only got to be yourself and you'll be all right."

"No," argued Jack Head. "If the man's himself, he's not funny, and nobody will laugh. I say——"

"You can show us what you mean when you come to your own part, Jack," said Dennis desperately. "Do get on, Gollop."

"Bow then," said Mr. Gollop to Nathan.

"I'll bow when you do, and not a minute sooner," answered the innkeeper firmly.

The matter of the bow was arranged, and Mr. Gollop, in the familiar voice with which he had led the psalms for a quarter of a century, began his part.

> "Here I, the King of Egypt, boldly do appear,
> St. Garge! St. Garge! walk in, my only son and heir;
> Walk in, St. Garge, my son, and boldly act thy part,
> That all the people here may see thy wondrous art!"

"Well done, Tom!" said Mr. Masterman, "that's splendid; but you mustn't sing it."

"I ban't singing it," answered the clerk. "I know what to do."

"All right. Now St. George, St. George, where are you?"

"Along with the girls as usual," snapped Mr. Gollop.

As a matter of fact Ned Baskerville was engaged in deep conversation with Princess Sabra and the Turkish Knight. He left them and hurried forward.

"Give tongue, Ned!" cried his father.

"You walk down to the footlights, and the King of Egypt will be on one side of you and Father Christmas on the other," explained the vicar.

"And you needn't look round for the females, 'cause they don't appear till later on," added Jack Head.

A great laugh followed this jest, whereon Miss Masterman begged her brother to try and keep order.

"If they are not going to be serious, we had better give it up, and waste no more time," she said.

"Don't take it like that, miss, I beg of you," urged Nathan. "All's prospering very well. We shall shape down. Go on, Ned."

Ned looked at his part, then put it behind his back, and then brought it out again.

"This is too bad, Baskerville," complained Dennis. "You told me yesterday that you knew every word."

"So I did yesterday, I'll swear to it. I said it out in the kitchen after supper to mother — didn't I, father?"

"You did," assented Vivian; "but that's no use if you've forgot it now."

"'Tis stage fright," explained Nathan. "You'll get over it."

"Think you'm talking to a maiden," advised Jack Head.

"Do get on!" cried Dennis. Then he prompted the faulty mummer.

"Here come I, St. George ——"

Ned struck an attitude and started.

"Here come I, St. George; from Britain did I spring;
I'll fight the Russian Bear, my wonders to begin.
I'll pierce him through, he shall not fly;
I'll cut him — cut him — cut him ——"

"How does it go?"

"'I'll cut him down,'" prompted Dennis.

"Right!"

"I'll cut him down, or else I'll die."

"Good! Now, come on, Bear!" said Nathan.

"You and Jack Head will have to practise the fight," explained the vicar; "and at this point, or earlier, the ladies will march in to music and take their places, because, of course, 'fair Sabra' has to see St. George conquer his foes."

"That'll suit Ned exactly!" laughed Nathan.

Then he marshalled Cora and several other young women, including May and Polly Baskerville from Cadworthy, and Cora's sister Phyllis.

"There will be a daïs lifted up at the back, you know — that's a raised platform. But for the present you must pretend these chairs are the throne. You sit by 'fair Sabra,' Thomas, and then the trumpets sound and the Bear comes on."

"Who'll play the brass music?" asked Head, "because I've got a very clever friend at Sheepstor——"

"Leave all that to me. The music is arranged. Now, come on!"

"Shall you come on and play it like a four-footed thing, or get up on your hind-legs, Jack?" asked St. George.

"I be going to come in growling and yowling on all fours," declared Mr. Head grimly. "Then I be going to do a sort of a comic bear dance; then I be going to have a bit of fun eating a plum pudding; then I thought that me and Mr. Nathan might have a bit of comic work; and then I should get up on my hind-legs and go for St. George."

"You can't do all that," declared Dennis. "Not that I want to interfere with you, or anybody, Head; but if each one is going to work out his part and put such a lot into it, we shall never get done."

"The thing is to make 'em laugh, reverend Masterman," answered Jack with firmness. "If I just come on and just say my speech, and fight and die, there's nought in it; but if——"

"Go on, then—go on. We'll talk afterwards."

"Right. Now you try not to laugh, souls, and I wager I'll make you giggle like a lot of zanies," promised Jack.

Then he licked his hands, went down upon them, and scrambled along upon all fours.

"Good for you, Jack! Well done! You'm funnier than anything that's gone afore!" cried Joe Voysey.

"So you be, for certain," added Mrs. Hacker.

"For all the world like my bob-tailed sheep-dog," declared Mr. Waite.

"Now I be going to sit up on my hams and scratch myself," explained Mr. Head; "then off I go again and have a sniff at Father Christmas. Then you ought to give me a plum pudding, Mr. Baskerville, and I balance it 'pon my nose."

"Well thought on!" declared Nathan. "So I will. 'Twill make the folk die of laughing to see you."

"Come on to the battle," said Dennis.

"Must be a sort of wraslin' fight," continued Head, "because the Bear's got nought but his paws. Then, I thought, when I'd throwed St. George a fair back heel, he'd get up and draw his shining sword and stab me in the guts. Then I'd roar and roar, till the place fairly echoed round, and then I'd die in frightful agony."

"You ban't the whole play, Jack," said Mr. Gollop with much discontent. "You forget yourself, surely. You can't have the King of Egypt and these here other high characters all standing on the stage doing nought while you'm going through these here vagaries."

But Mr. Head stuck to his text.

"We'm here to make 'em laugh," he repeated with

bull-dog determination. "And I'll do it if mortal man can do it. Then, when I've took the doctor's stuff, up I gets again and goes on funnier than ever."

"I wouldn't miss it for money, Jack," declared Vivian Baskerville. "Such a clever chap as you be, and none of us ever knowed it. You ought to go for Tom Fool to the riders.[1] I lay you'd make tons more money than ever you will to Trowlesworthy Warren."

"By the way, who is to be the Doctor?" asked Ned Baskerville. "'Twasn't settled, Mr. Masterman."

Dennis collapsed blankly.

"By Jove, no! More it was," he admitted, "and I've forgotten all about it. The Doctor's very important, too. We must have him before the next rehearsal. For the present you can read it out of the book, Mark."

Mark Baskerville was prompting, and now, after St. George and the Bear had made a pretence of wrestling, and the Bear had perished with much noise and to the accompaniment of loud laughter, Mark read the Doctor's somewhat arrogant pretensions.

"All sorts of diseases —
Whatever you pleases:
The phthisic, the palsy, the gout,
If the Devil's in, I blow him out.

* * * * * *

"I carry a bottle of alicampane,
Here, Russian Bear, take a little of my flip-flap,
Pour it down thy tip-tap;
Rise up and fight again!"

"Well said, Mark! 'Twas splendidly given. Why for shouldn't Mark be Doctor?" asked Nathan.

"An excellent idea," declared Dennis. "I'm sure now, if the fair Queen Sabra will only put in a word ——"

[1] *The Riders* — a circus.

Mark's engagement was known. The people clapped their hands heartily and Cora blushed.

"I wish he would," said Cora.

"Your wish ought to be his law," declared Ned. "I'm sure if 'twas me ——"

But Mark shook his head.

"I couldn't do it," he answered. "I would if I could; but when the time came, and the people, and the excitement of it all, I should break down, I'm sure I should."

"It's past ten o'clock," murmured Miss Masterman to her brother.

The rehearsal proceeded: Jack Head, as the Bear, was restored to life and slain again with much detail. Then Ned proceeded —

> "I fought the Russian Bear
> And brought him to the slaughter;
> By that I won fair Sabra,
> The King of Egypt's daughter.
> Where is the man that now will me defy?
> I'll cut his giblets full of holes and make his buttons fly."

"And when I've got my sword, of course 'twill be much finer," concluded Ned.

Mr. Gollop here raised an objection.

"I don't think the man ought to tell about cutting anybody's giblets full of holes," he said; "no, nor yet making their buttons fly. 'Tis very coarse, and the gentlefolks wouldn't like it."

"Nonsense, Tom," answered the vicar, "it's all in keeping with the play. There's no harm in it at all."

"Evil be to them as evil think," said Jack Head. "Now comes the song, reverend Masterman, and I was going to propose that the Bear, though he's dead as a nit, rises up on his front paws and sings with the rest, then drops down again — eh, souls?"

"They'll die of laughing if you do that, Jack," declared Vivian. "I vote for it."

But Dennis firmly refused permission and addressed his chorus.

"Now, girls, the song — everybody joins. The other songs are not written yet, so we need not bother about them till next time."

The girls, glad of something to do, sang vigorously, and the song went well. Then the Turkish Knight was duly slain, restored and slain again.

"We can't finish to-night," declared Dennis, looking at his watch, "so I'm sorry to have troubled you to come, Mrs. Hacker, and you, Voysey."

"They haven't wasted their time, however, because Head and I have showed them what acting means," said Nathan. "And when you do come on, Susan Hacker, you've got to quarrel and pull my beard, remember; then we make it up afterwards."

"We'll finish for to-night with the Giant," decreed Dennis. "Now speak your long speech, St. George, and then Mr. Baskerville can do the Giant."

Ned, who declared that he had as yet learned no more, read his next speech, and Vivian began behind the scenes —

> "Fee — fi — fo — fum!
> I smell the blood of an Englishman.
> Let him be living, or let him be dead,
> I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

"You ought to throw a bit more roughness in your voice, farmer," suggested Mr. Gollop. "If you could bring it up from the innards, 'twould sound more awful, wouldn't it, reverend Masterman?"

"And when you come on, farmer, you might pass me by where I lie dead," said Jack, "and I'll up and give you a nip in the calf of the leg, and you'll jump round, and the people will roar again."

"No," declared the vicar. "No more of you, Head, till the end. Then you come to life and dance with the French Eagle — that's Voysey. But you mustn't act any more till then."

"A pity," answered Jack. "I was full of contrivances; however, if you say so ——"

"Be I to dance?" asked Mr. Voysey. "This is the first I've heard tell o' that. How can I dance, and the rheumatism eating into my knees for the last twenty year?"

"I'll dance," said Head. "You can just turn round and round slowly."

"Now, Mr. Baskerville!"

Vivian strode on to the stage.

"Make your voice big, my dear," pleaded Gollop.

> "Here come I, the Giant; bold Turpin is my name,
> And all the nations round do tremble at my fame,
> Where'er I go, they tremble at my sight:
> No lord or champion long with me will dare to fight."

"People will cheer you like thunder, Vivian," said his brother, "because they know that the nations really did tremble at your fame when you was champion wrestler of the west."

"But you mustn't stand like that, farmer," said Jack Head. "You'm too spraddlesome. For the Lord's sake, man, try and keep your feet in the same parish!"

Mr. Baskerville bellowed with laughter and slapped his immense thigh.

"Dammy! that's funnier than anything in the play," he said. "'Keep my feet in the same parish!' Was ever a better joke heard?"

"Now, St. George, kill the Giant," commanded Dennis. "The Giant will have a club, and he'll try to smash you; then you run him through the body."

"Take care you don't hit Ned in real earnest, however, else you'd settle him and spoil the play," said Mr. Voysey. "'Twould be a terrible tantarra for certain if the Giant went and whipped St. George."

"'Twouldn't be the first time, however," said Mr. Baskerville. "Would it, Ned?"

Nathan and Ned's sisters appreciated this family joke. Then Mr. Gollop advanced a sentimental objection.

"I may be wrong," he admitted, "but I can't help thinking it might be a bit ondecent for Ned Baskerville here to kill his father, even in play. You see, though everybody will know 'tis Ned and his parent, and that they'm only pretending, yet it might shock a serious-minded person here and there to see the son kill the father. I don't say I mind, as 'tis all make-believe and the frolic of a night; but — well, there 'tis."

"You'm a silly old grandmother, and never no King of Egypt was such a fool afore," said Jack. "Pay no heed to him, reverend Masterman."

Gollop snarled at Head, and they began to wrangle fiercely.

Then Dennis closed the rehearsal.

"That'll do for the present," he announced. "We've made a splendid start, and the thing to remember is that we meet here again this day week, at seven o'clock. And mind you know your part, Ned. Another of the songs will be ready by then; and the new harmonium will have come that my sister is going to play. And do look about, all of you, to find somebody who will take the Doctor."

"We shall have the nation's eyes on us — not for the first time," declared Mr. Gollop as he tied a white wool muffler round his throat; "and I'm sure I hope one and all will do the best that's in 'em."

The actors departed; the oil lamps were extinguished, and the vicar and his sister returned home. She said little by the way, and her severe silence made him rather nervous.

"Well," he broke out at length, "jolly good, I think, for a first attempt — eh, Alice?"

"I'm glad you were satisfied, dear. Everything depends upon us — that seems quite clear, at any rate. They'll all get terribly self-conscious and silly, I'm afraid, long before the time comes. However, we must hope for the best. But I shouldn't be in a hurry to ask anybody who really matters."

CHAPTER XII

IN a triangle the wild land of the Rut sloped down from Hawk House to the valley beneath, and its solitary time of splendour belonged to Spring, when the great furzes were blooming and the white thorns filled the valley with light. Hither came Mark to keep tryst with Cora beside the stream. He walked not loverly but languid, for his mind was in trouble, and his gait reflected it.

To water's brink he came, sat on a familiar stump above Torry Brook, and watched sunshine play over the ripples and a dance of flies upon the sunshine.

Looked at in a mass, the insects seemed no more than a glimmering, like a heat haze, over the water and against the background of the woods; but noted closer the plan and pattern of these myriads showed method: the little storm of flies gyrated in a circle, and while the whole cluster swept this way and that with the proper motion of the mass, yet each individual, like planets round the sun, revolved about a definite but shifting centre. The insects whirled round and round, rose and sank again, each atom describing repeated circles; and though the united motion of this company suspended here in air appeared inconceivably rapid and dazzling, yet the progress of each single gnat was not fast.

Mark observed this little galaxy of glittering lives, and, knowing some natural history, he considered intelligently the thing he saw. For a moment it distracted him. A warm noon had wakened innumerable brief existences that a cold night would still again. All

this immense energy must soon cease and the ephemeral atoms perish at the chill touch of evening; but to Nature it mattered neither more nor less if a dance of nebulæ or a dance of gnats should make an end that night. Countless successions of both were a part of her work. From awful marriages of ancient suns new suns would certainly be born; and out of this midge dance here above the water, potential dances for another day were ensured, before the little system sank to rest, the aureole of living light became extinguished.

He turned from the whirl and wail of the gnats to his own thoughts, and found them also revolving restlessly. But their sun and centre was Cora. He had asked her to meet him here, in a favourite and secret place, that he might speak harsh things to her. There was no love-making toward just now. She had angered him once and again. He considered his grievances, strove to palliate them, and see all with due allowance; but his habit of mind, if vague, was not unjust. He loved her passionately, but that she should put deliberate indignities upon him argued a faulty reciprocity of love. Time had revealed that Cora did not care for Mark as well as he cared for her; and that would not have mattered — he held it reasonable. But he desired a larger measure of affection and respect than he had received. Then to his quick senses even the existing affection diminished, and respect appeared to die.

These dire shadows had risen out of the rehearsals for the play. Cora's attitude towards other young men first astonished Mark and then annoyed him. He kept his annoyance to himself, however, for fear of being laughed at. Then, thanks to his cousin, Ned Baskerville, and the young farmer, Timothy Waite, he was laughed at, for Cora found these youths better company than Mark himself, and Jack Head and others did not hesitate to rally him about his indifferent lady.

"She's more gracious with either of them than with me," he reflected. "Why, actually, when I offered as usual to walk home with her last week, she said yonder man had promised to do so and she need not trouble me!"

As he spoke he lifted his eyes where a farm showed on the hills westerly through the trees. Coldstone was a prosperous place, and the freehold of a prosperous man, young Waite, the Turkish Knight of the play.

He had seen Cora home according to her wish, and Mark had kept his temper and afterwards made the present appointment by letter. Now Cora came to him, late from another interview — but concerning it she said nothing.

On her way from Undershaugh it happened that she had fallen in with Mark's father. The old man rode his pony, and Cora was passing him hastily when he stopped and called her to him. They had not met since the occasion of the girl's first and last visit to Hawk House.

"Come hither," he said. "I've fretted you, it seems, and set you against me. I'm sorry for that. You should be made of stouter stuff. Shake hands with me, Cora, please."

He held out his hand and she took it silently.

"I'll turn and go a bit of your road. If you intend to marry my son, you must make shift to be my daughter, you see. What was it made you so cross that you ran away? But I know — I spoke against your clothes."

"You spoke against everything. I felt in every drop of blood in my body that you didn't like me. That's why I had to run."

He was silent a moment. Suddenly he pointed to one faint gold torch above their heads, where a single

bough of an elm was autumn-painted, and began to glow on the bosom of a tree still green. It stood out shining against the deep summer darkness of the foliage.

"What d'you make of that?" he asked.

She looked up.

"'Tis winter coming again, I suppose."

"Yes — winter for us, death for the leaves. I'm like that — I'm frost-bitten here and there — in places. 'Twas a frosty day with me when you came to dinner. I'm sorry I hurt you. But you must be sensible. It's a lot harder to be a good wife than a popular maiden. My son Mark will need a strong-minded woman, not a silly one. The question is, are you going to rise to it? However, we'll leave that. How did you know in every drop of your blood, as you say, that you'd failed to please me?"

"I knew it by — oh, by everything. By your eyes and by the tone of your voice. You said you wanted to talk to me."

"Well, I did."

"You never asked me nothing."

"There was no need, you told me everything."

"I said nought, I'm sure."

"You said all I wanted to hear and told me a lot more than I wanted, or expected, to hear for that matter."

"I'm sure I don't understand you, Mr. Baskerville."

"No need — no need. That's only to say you're like the rest. They wonder how 'tis they don't understand me — fools that they are! — and yet how many understand themselves? I'll tell you this: you're not the right wife for Mark."

"Then I won't marry him. There's quite as good as him, and better, for that matter."

"Plenty. Take young Waite from Coldstone Farm, for instance. A strong man he is. My son Mark is

a weak man — a gentle character he hath. 'Tis the strong men — they that want things — that alter the face of the world, and make history, and help the breed — not such as Mark. He'd spoil you and bring out all the very worst of you. Such a man as Waite would do different. He'd not stand your airs and graces, and little silly whims and fancies. He'd break you in; he'd tame you; and you'd look back afterwards and thank God you fell to a strong man and not a weak one."

"Women marry for love, not for taming," she said.

"Some, perhaps, but not you. You ban't built to love, if you want to know the whole truth," he answered calmly. "You belong to a sort of woman who takes all and gives nought. I wish I could ope your eyes to yourself, but I suppose that's beyond human power. But this I'll say: I wish you nothing but good; and the best good of all for such a one as you is to get a glimpse of yourself through a sensible and not unkindly pair of eyes. If you are going to marry Mark, and want to be a happy woman and wish him to be a happy man, you must think of a lot of things beside your wedding frock."

"For two pins I wouldn't marry him at all after this," she said. "You'd break any girl's heart, speaking so straight and coarse to her. I ban't accustomed to be talked to so cruel, and I won't stand it."

"I do beg you to think again," he said, stopping his pony. "I'm only telling you what I've often told myself. I'm always open to hear sense from any man, save now and again when I find myself in a black mood and won't hear anything. But you — a green girl as haven't seen one glimpse of the grey side yet — why, 'tis frank foolishness to refuse good advice from an old man."

"You don't want to give me good advice," she

answered, and her face was red and her voice high; "you only want to make me think small things of myself, and despise myself, and to choke me off Mark."

"To choke you off Mark might be the best advice anybody could give you, for that matter, my dear; and as to your thinking small things of yourself — no such luck I see. You'll go on thinking a lot of your little, empty self till you stop thinking for good and all. Life ban't going to teach you anything worth knowing, because you've stuffed up your ears with self-conceit and vanity. So go your way; but if you get a grain of sense come back to me, and I shall be very glad to hear about it."

He left her standing still in a mighty temper. She felt inclined to fling a stone after him. And yet she rejoiced at the bottom of her heart, because this scene made her future actions easier. Only one thing still held her to Mark Baskerville, and that was his money. The sickly ghost of regard for him, which she was pleased to call love, existed merely as the answer to her own appeal to her conscience. She had never loved him, but when the opportunity came, she could not refuse his worldly wealth and the future of successful comfort it promised.

Now, however, were appearing others who attracted her far more. Two men had entered into her life since the rehearsals, and both pleased her better than Mark. One she liked for his person and for his charms of manner and of speech; the other for his masterful character and large prosperity. One was better looking than Mark, and knew far better how to worship a woman; the other was perhaps as rich as Mark would be, and he appealed to her much more by virtue of his masculinity and vigour. Mr. Baskerville had actually mentioned this individual during the recent conversation; and it was of him, too, that Mark

considered where he sat and waited for Cora by the stream.

But though she felt Timothy Waite's value, yet a thing even stronger drew her to the other man. Ned Baskerville was the handsomest, gallantest, most fascinating creature that Cora had ever known. Chance threw them little together until the rehearsals, but since then they had met often, and advanced far along a road of mutual admiration. Like clove to like, and the emptiness of each heart struck a kindred echo from the other; but neither appreciated the hollowness of the sound.

Under these circumstances Humphrey Baskerville's strictures, though exceedingly painful to her self-love, were not unwelcome, for they made the thing that she designed to do reasonable and proper. It would be simple to quote his father to her betrothed when she threw him over.

In this temper Cora now appeared to Mark. Had he been aware of it he might have hesitated before adding further fuel to the flames. But he began in a friendly fashion, rose and kissed her.

"You're late, Cora. Look here. Sit down and get cool and watch these flies. The merry dancers, they are called, and well they may be. 'Tis a regular old country measure they seem to tread in the air — figure in and cross over and all — just like you do when you go through the old dance in the play."

But she was in no mood of softness.

"A tidy lot of dancing I'll get when I'm married to you! You know you hate it, and hate everything else with any joy and happiness to it. You're only your father over again, when all's said, and God defend me from him! I can't stand no more of him, and I won't."

"You've met him?" said Mark. "I was afraid you might. I'm sorry for that."

"Not so sorry as I am. If I was dirt by the road he couldn't have treated me worse. And I'm not going to suffer it — never once more — not if he was ten times your father!"

"What did he say?"

"What didn't he say? Not a kind word, anyway. And 'tis vain your sticking up for him, because he don't think any better of you than he do of me seemingly. 'Twas to that man he pointed." She raised her arm towards the farm through the trees. "He thinks a lot more of Timothy Waite than he does of you, I can tell you."

"I'll talk to father. This can't go on."

"No, it can't go on. Life's too short for this sort of thing. I won't be bullied by anybody. People seem to forget who I am."

"You mustn't talk so, Cora. I'm terrible sorry about it; but father's father, and he'll go his own rough way, and you ought to know what way that is by now. Don't take it to heart — he means well."

"'Heart!' I've got no heart according to him — no heart, no sense, no nothing. Just a dummy to show off pretty clothes."

"He never said that!"

"Yes, he did; and worse, and I'm tired of it. You're not the only man in the world."

"Nothing is gained by my quarrelling with father."

"I suppose not; but I've got my self-respect, and I can't marry the son of a man that despises me openly like he does. I won't be bullied by him, I promise you — a cruel hunks he is, and would gore me to pieces if he dared! No better than a mad bull, I call him."

"'Tis no good your blackguarding my father, Cora," said Mark.

"Perhaps not; and 'tis no good his blackguarding

me. Very different to your Uncle Vivian, I'm sure. Always a kind word and a pat on the cheek he've got; and so have your Uncle Nathan."

"Uncle Vivian can be hard enough too — as my cousin Rupert that means to marry Milly Luscombe will tell you. In fact, Rupert's going away because he won't stand his father."

"Why don't you go away then? If you were worth your salt, you'd turn your back on any man living who has treated me so badly as your father has."

"We're in for a row, it seems," answered Mark, "and I'd better begin and get a painful job over. When you've heard me, I'll hear you. In the matter of my father I'll do what a son can do — that I promise you; but there's something on my side too."

"Say it out then — the sooner the better."

She found herself heartily hating Mark and was anxious to break with him while angry; because anger would make an unpleasant task more easy.

"In a word, it's Ned Baskerville and that man over there — Waite. These rehearsals of the play — you know very well how you carry on, Cora; and you know very well 'tisn't right or seemly. You've promised to marry me, and you are my life and soul; but I can't share you with no other man. You can't flirt with Ned while you're engaged to me; you can't ask Waite to see you home of a night while you're engaged to me. You don't know what you're doing."

"Why ban't you more dashing then?" she asked. "You slink about so mean and humble. Why don't you take a part in the play, and do as other men, and talk louder and look people in the face, as if you wasn't feared to death of 'em? If you grumble, then I'll grumble too. You haven't got enough pluck for me. Ned's different, and so's t'other man, for that

matter. I see how much they admire me; I know how they would go through fire and water for me."

"Not they! Master Ned — why — he can roll his eyes and roll his voice; but — there — go on! Finish what you've got to say."

"I've only got to say that there's a deal about Ned you might very well copy in my opinion. He's a man, anyway, and a handsome man for that matter. And if you're going to fall out with your father, then you'll lose your money, and ——"

"I'm not going to fall out with him. You needn't fear that."

"Then more shame to you, for keeping friendly with a man that hates me. Call that love! Ned ——"

"Have done about Ned!" he cried out. "Ned's a lazy, caddling good-for-nought — the laughing-stock of every decent man and sane woman in Shaugh. A wastrel — worthless. You think he's fond of you, I suppose?"

"I know he is. And you know it."

"Yes, just as fond of you as he is of every other girl that will let him be. Anything that wears a petticoat can get to his empty heart — poor fool. Love! What does he know of that — a great, bleating baby! His love isn't worth the wind he takes to utter it; and you'll very soon find that out — like other girls have — if you listen to him."

"He knows what pleases a woman, anyway."

"Cora! Cora! What are you saying? D'you want to drive me mad?"

He started up and stared at her.

"'Twouldn't be driving you far. Better sit down again and listen to me now."

"I'll listen to nothing. I'm choking — I'm stifling! To think that you — oh, Cora — good God Almighty — and for such a man as that ——"

He rushed away frantically and she saw him no more. He had not given her time to strike the definite blow. But she supposed that it was as good as struck. After such a departure and such words, they could not meet again even as friends. The engagement was definitely at an end in her mind, for by no stretch of imagination might this be described as a lovers' quarrel.

All was over; she rejoiced at her renewal of liberty and resolved not to see Mark any more, no matter how much he desired it.

She flung away the luncheon that she had brought and set off for home, trusting that she might meet Humphrey Baskerville upon the way. She longed to see him again now and repay him for a little of the indignity that he had put upon her.

But she did not meet Mark's father.

On the evening of the same day a congenial spirit won slight concessions from her. Ned Baskerville arrived on some pretext concerning the play. He knew very well by this time that, in the matter of her engagement, Cora was a victim, and he felt, as he had often felt before in other cases, that she was the only woman on earth to make him a happy man. He despised Mark and experienced little compunction with respect to him.

Upon this night Mrs. Lintern was out, and Cora made no objection to putting on her hat and going to the high ground above Shaugh Prior to look at the moon.

"'Twon't take above ten minutes, and then I'll see you back," said Ned.

They went together, and he flattered her and paid her many compliments and humbled himself before her. She purred and was pleased. They moved along together and he told her that she was like the princess in the play.

"You say nought, but, my God, you look every inch a princess! If 'twas real life, I'd slay fifty giants and a hundred bears for you, Cora."

"Don't you begin that silliness. I'm sure you don't mean a word of it, Ned."

"If you could see my heart, Cora, you'd see only one name there — I swear it."

"What about t'other names — all rubbed out, I suppose?"

"They never were there. All the other girls were ghosts beside you. Not one of them ——"

Suddenly near at hand the church bells began to throb and tremble upon the peace of moonlit night.

"Mark's out of the way then," said Ned. "Not that I'm afraid of him, or any other man. You're too good for Mark, Cora — a million times too good for him. I'm bound to tell you so."

"I'm sick of him and his bell-ringing," she said violently.

"Hullo! That's strong," he exclaimed.

"So would any maiden be. He puts tenor bell afore me. 'Tis more to him than ever I was. In a word, I've done with the man!"

"You splendid, plucky creature! 'Twas bound to come. Such a spirit as yours never could have brooked a worm like him! You're free then?"

"Yes, I am."

Elsewhere in the belfry Mark rang himself into better humour. The labour physicked his grief and soothed his soul. He told himself that all the fault was his, and when the chimes were still, he put on his coat and went to Undershaugh to beg forgiveness.

Phyllis met him.

"Cora's out walking," she said.

"Out walking! Who with?" he asked.

But Phyllis was nothing if not cautious. She had more heart, but not more conscience than her sister.

"I don't know — alone, I think," she answered.

CHAPTER XIII

A DAY of storm buffeted the Moor. Fitful streaks of light roamed through a wild and silver welter of low cloud; and now they rested on a pool or river, and the water flashed; and now they fired the crests of the high lands or made the ruddy brake-fern flame. Behind Shaugh Moor was storm-cloud, and beneath it, oozing out into the valleys, extended the sullen green of water-logged fields hemmed in with autumnal hedges.

Hither came Mark Baskerville on his way to Shaugh, and then a man stopped him and changed his plan. For some time he had neither seen nor heard from Cora, and unable longer to live with this cloud between them, Mark was now on his way to visit her.

Consideration had convinced him that he was much in fault, and that she did well to keep aloof until he came penitent back again; but he had already striven more than once to do so, and she had refused to see him. He told himself that it was natural she should feel angered at the past, and natural that she should be in no haste to make up so serious a quarrel.

But the catastrophe had now shrunk somewhat in his estimation, and he doubted not that Cora, during the passage of many days, also began to see it in its proper perspective. He did not wholly regret their difference, and certain words that she had spoken still stung painfully when he considered them; but the dominant hunger in his mind was to get back to her, kiss her lips and hear her voice again. He would be very circumspect henceforth, and doubtless so would she. He felt sure

that Cora regretted their difference now, and that the time was over-ripe for reconciliation.

The next rehearsal would take place upon the following day, and Mark felt that friendly relations must be re-established before that event. He was on his road to see Cora and take no further denial, when her brother met him and stopped him.

"Lucky I ran against you," said Heathman; "I've got a letter for you from my sister, and meant to leave it on my way out over to Lee Moor. Coarse weather coming by the look of it."

"Thank you," answered Mark. "You've saved me a journey then. I was bound for Undershaugh."

Heathman, who knew that he bore evil news, departed quickly, while the other, with true instinct of sybarite, held the precious letter a moment before opening it.

It happened that Cora seldom wrote to him, for they met very often; but now, having a difficult thing to say, she sought this medium, and Mark, knowing not the truth, was glad.

"Like me—couldn't keep it up no more," he thought. "I almost wish she'd let me say I was sorry first; but she might have heard me say so a week ago, if she'd liked. Thank Heaven we shall be happy again before dark. I'll promise everything in the world she wants to-night—even to the ring with the blue stone she hungered after at Plymouth."

He looked round, then the wind hustled him and the rain broke in a tattered veil along the edge of the hill.

"I'll get up to Hawk Tor, and lie snug there, and read her letter in the lew place I filled with fern for her," he thought.

There was a natural cavern facing west upon this height, and here, in a nook sacred to Cora, he sat

presently and lighted his pipe and so came to the pleasant task. He determined that having read her plea for forgiveness, it would be impossible to wait until nightfall without seeing her.

"I'll go down and take dinner with them," he decided: then he read the letter:—

"DEAR MARK,

"After what happened a little while ago you cannot be surprised if I say I will not marry you. There is nothing to be said about it except that I have quite made up my mind. I have thought about it ever since, and not done nothing in a hurry. We would not suit one another, and the older we grew, the worse we should quarrel. So it will be better to part before any harm is done. You will easily find a quieter sort of girl, without so much spirit as me. And she will suit you better than what I do. I have told my mother that I am not going to marry you. And Mr. Nathan Baskerville, your own uncle, though he is very sorry indeed about it, is our family friend and adviser, and he says it is better we understand and part at once. I hope you won't make any fuss, as *nothing will change me.* And you will have the pleasure of knowing your father will be thankful. No doubt you will soon find a better-looking and nicer girl than me, and somebody that your father won't treat the same as he treated

"Yours truly,

"CORA LINTERN."

Through the man's stunned grief and above the chaos of his thoughts, one paramount and irrevocable conviction reigned. Cora meant what she wrote, and nothing that he had power to say or to do would win her back again. She would never change; she had

seen him in anger and the sight had determined her; she had met his father and had felt that such antagonism must ruin her life.

He possessed imagination and was able swiftly to feel what life must mean without her. He believed that his days would be impossible henceforth. He read the letter again and marked how she began with restraint and gradually wrote herself into anger.

She smarted when she reflected on his father; and he soon convinced himself that it was his father who had driven her to these conclusions. He told himself that he did not blame her. The pipe in his mouth had been given to him by Cora. He emptied it now, put it into its case, rose up and went home. He planned the things to say to his father and determined to show him the letter. Mark desired to make his father suffer, and did not doubt but that he would suffer when this catastrophe came to his ears.

Then his father appeared before him, far off, driven by the wind; and Mark, out of his tortured mind, marvelled to think that a thing so small as this dim spot, hastening like a dead leaf along, should have been powerful enough, and cruel enough, deliberately to ruin his life. For he was now obsessed by the belief that his father alone must be thanked for the misfortune.

They came together, and Humphrey shouted to be heard against the riot of the wind. His hat was pressed over his ears; the tails of his coat and the hair on his head leapt and danced; his eyes were watering.

"A brave wind! Might blow sense into a man, if anything could. What are you doing up here?"

"Read that," said the other, and his father stopped and stared at him. Despite the rough air and the wild music of heath and stone, Mark's passion was not hidden and his face as well as his voice proclaimed it.

"See what you have done for your only son," he cried.

Humphrey held out his hand for the letter, took it and turned his back to the wind. He read it slowly, then returned it to Mark.

"She means that," he answered. "This isn't the time to speak to you. I know all that's moving in you, and I guess how hard life looks. But I warn you: be just. I'm used to be misread by the people and care nought; but I'd not like for you to misread me. You think that I've done this."

"I know you have — and done it with malice aforethought too. The only thing I've ever loved in life — the only thing that ever comed into my days to make 'em worth living — and you go to work behind my back to take it away from me. And me as good a son to you as my nature would allow — always — always."

"As good a son as need be hoped for — I grant that. But show a little more sense in this. Use your brains, of which you've got too many for your happiness, and see the truth. Can a father choke a girl off a man if she loves the man? Was it ever heard that mother or father stopped son or daughter from loving? 'Tis against nature, and nought I could have said, and nought I could have done would have come between her and you — never, if she'd loved you worth a curse. But she didn't. She loved the promise of your money. She loved the thought of being the grey mare and playing with a weak man's purse. She loved to think on the future, when I was underground and her way clear. And that hope would have held with her just as strong after knowing me, as before knowing me. The passing trouble of me, and my straight, sour speeches, and my eyes looking through her into her dirty little heart, wouldn't have turned

the girl away from you, if she'd loved you honestly. Why, even lust of money would have been too strong to break down under that — let alone love of man. 'Tis not I but somebody else has sloked[1] her away from thee. And the time will come when you may live to thank your God that it's happened so. But enough of that. I can bear your hard words, Mark; and bitter though 'twill sound upon your ear, I'll tell you this: I'm thankful above measure she's flung you over. 'Tis the greatest escape of your life, and a blessing in disguise — for more reasons than you know, or ever will. And as for him that's done it, nought that you can wish him be likely to turn out much worse than what he'll get if he marries that woman."

"Shouldn't I know if 'twas another man? She was friendly and frank with all. She hadn't a secret from me. 'Twas only my own blind jealousy made me think twice about it when she talked with other men."

"But she did talk with 'em and you did think twice? And you didn't like it? And you quarrelled — eh? And that was the sense in you — the sense trying to lift you above the blind instinct you'd got for her. Would you have quarrelled for nothing? Are you that sort? Too fond of taking affronts and offering the other cheek, you are — like I was once. You can't blind me. You've suffered at her hands already, and spoken, and this is her slap back at you. No need to drag me in at all then; though I did give her raw sense for her dinner when she came to see me. Look further on than your father for the meaning of this letter. Look to yourself first, and if that don't throw light, look afield."

"There's none — none more than another — I'll swear it."

[1] *Sloked* — enticed and tempted.

"Seek a man with money and with a face like a barber's image and not over-much sense. That's the sort will win her; and that's the sort will suit her. And now I've done."

They walked together and said the same things over and over again, as people are prone to do in argument. Then they separated in heat, for the father lost patience and again declared his pleasure at this accident.

Whereon Mark cried out against him for a callous and brutal spirit, and so left him, and turned blindly homeward. He did not know what to do or how to fight this great tribulation. He could not believe it. He came back to Hawk House at last and found himself in an angle of the dwelling, out of the wind.

Here reigned artificial silence and peace. The great gale roared overhead; but beneath, in this nook, not a straw stirred. He stood and stared at his fallen hopes and ruined plans; while from a dry spot beside the wall, there came to him the sweet, sleepy chirruping of chickens that cuddled together under their mother's wings.

CHAPTER XIV

WHILE the desolation of Mark Baskerville came to be learnt, and some sympathised with him and some held that Cora Lintern had showed a very proper spirit to refuse a man cursed with such a father, lesser trouble haunted Cadworthy Farm, for the parent of Rupert Baskerville declared himself to be suffering from a great grievance.

Vivian was an obstinate man and would not yield to his son's demand; but the situation rapidly reached a climax, for Rupert would not yield either.

Night was the farmer's time for long discussions with his wife; and there came a moment when he faced the present crisis with her and strove for some solution of the difficulty.

"Unray yourself and turn out the light and come to bed," he said to Mrs. Baskerville. He already lay in their great four-poster, and, solid though the monster was, it creaked when Vivian's immense bulk turned upon it.

His wife soon joined him and then he began to talk. He prided himself especially on his reasonableness, after the fashion of unreasonable men.

"It can't go on and it shan't," he said. "Never was heard such a thing as a son defying his father this way. If he'd only given the girl up, then I should have been the first to relax authority and tell him he might have her in due season if she liked to wait. But for him to cleave to her against my express order — 'tis a very improper and undutiful thing — specially when you take into account what a father I've been to the man."

"And he've been a good son, too."

"And why not? I was a good son — better than ever Rupert was. And would I have done this? I never thought of marriage till my parents were gone."

"Work was enough for you."

"And so it should be for every young man. But, nowadays, they think of nought but revels and outings and the girls. A poor, slack-twisted generation. My arm would make a leg for any youth I come across nowadays."

"You must remember you'm a wonder, my dear. We can't all be like you."

"My own sons ought to be, anyway. And I've a right to demand it of 'em."

"Rupert works as hard as a man can work — harder a thousand times than Ned."

"I won't have you name 'em together," he answered. "A man's firstborn is always a bit different to the rest. Ned is more given to reading and brain work."

She laughed fearlessly and he snorted like a bull beside her.

"What are you laughing at?" he said.

"At your silliness. Such a sharp chap and so wise as you are; and yet our handsome eldest — why, he can't do wrong! And Lord knows he can't do wrong in my eyes neither. Still, when it comes to work——"

"We'll leave Ned," answered the father. "He can work all right, and when you've seed him play St. George and marked his intellects and power of speech, you'll be the first to say what a 'mazing deal of cleverness be hid in him. His mind's above the land, and why not? We can't all be farmers. But Rupert's a born farmer, and seeing as he be going to follow my calling, he ought to follow my example and bide a bachelor for a good ten years more."

"She's a nice girl, however."

"She may be, or she may not be. Anyway, she's been advising him to go away from home, and that's not much to her credit."

"She loves him and hates for him to be here so miserable."

"He'll find himself a mighty sight more miserable away. Don't I pay him good money? Ban't he saving and prospering? What the deuce do he want to put a wife and children round his neck for till he's learned to keep his own head above water?"

"'Twas Mr. Luscombe's man that's determined him, I do think," declared Hester Baskerville. "Jack Head is just the sort to unsettle the young, with his mischievous ideas. All the same, I wish to God you could meet Rupert. He's a dear good son, and there's lots of room, and for my part I'd love to see him here with Milly. 'Tis high time you was a grandfather."

"You foolish women! Let him bide his turn then. The eldest first, I say. 'Tis quite in reason that Ned, with his fashion of mind, should take a wife. I've nought against that——"

"You silly men!" she said. "Ned! Why, what sensible girl will look at such a Jack-o'-lantern as him—bless him! He's too fond of all the girls ever to take one. And if he don't throw them over, after a bit of keeping company, they throw him over. If you could but see yourself and him! 'Tis as good as play-acting! 'There's only one lazy man in the world that your husband forgives for being lazy,' said Jack Head to me but yesterday. 'And who might that be?' said I, well knowing. 'Why, Ned, of course,' he answers back."

"I must talk to Jack's master. A lot too free of speech he's getting—just because they be going to let him perform the Bear at Christmas. But, when all's

said, the wise man makes up his own mind; and that have been my habit from my youth up."

"You think so," she answered.

"I know so. And Rupert may go. He'll soon come back."

"Never, master."

"He'll come back, I tell you. He'll find the outer world very different from Cadworthy."

"I wish you'd let that poor boy, Mark, be a lesson to you. Your love story ran suent, so you can't think what 'tis for a young thing to be crossed where the heart is set. It looks a small matter to us, as have forgotten the fret and fever, if we ever felt it, but to them 'tis life or death."

"That's all moonshine and story-books. And my story ran suent along of my own patience and good sense — no other reason. And I may tell you that Mark have took the blow in a very sensible spirit. I saw my brother a bit ago — Nathan I mean. He was terrible cut up for both of 'em, being as soft as a woman where young people are concerned. But he'd had a long talk with Mark and found him perfectly patient and resigned about it."

"The belving[1] cow soonest forgets her calf. 'Tis the quiet sort that don't make a row and call out their misfortunes in every ear, that feel the most. It's cut him to the heart and gone far to ruin his life — that's what it's done. You don't want to have your son in the same case?"

"Rupert's very different to that. 'Tis his will against mine, and if he disobeys, he must stand the brunt and see what life be like without me behind him. When Nathan went for a sailor, I said nothing. They couldn't all bide here, and 'twas a manly calling. But Rupert was brought up to take my

[1] *Belving* — bellowing.

place, owing to Ned's superior brain power; and now if he's going to fling off about a girl and defy me — well, he may go; but they laugh best who laugh last. He'll suffer for it."

"I'm much feared nought we can do will change him. That girl be everything to him. A terrible pity, too, for after you, I never knowed a man so greedy of work. 'Sundays! There are too many Sundays,' he said to Ned in my hearing not long since. 'What do a healthy man want to waste every seventh day for?' It might have been you talking."

"Not at all," answered her husband. "Very far from it. That's Jack Head's impious opinion. Who be we to question the Lord's ordaining? The seventh's the Lord's, and I don't think no better of Rupert for saying that, hard though it may sometimes be to keep your hands in your pockets, especially at hay harvest."

"Well, if you ban't going to budge, he'll go."

"Then let him go — and he can tell the people that he haven't got no father no more, for that's how 'twill be if he does go."

"Don't you say that, master."

"Why for not? Truth's truth. And now us will go to sleep, if you please."

Soon his mighty snore thundered through the darkness; but Mrs. Baskerville was well seasoned to the sound; and thoughts of her son, not the noisy repose of her husband, banished sleep.

Others had debated these vexed questions of late, and the dark, short days were made darker for certain sympathetic people by the troubles of Mark and the anxieties of his cousin, Rupert.

Nathan Baskerville discussed the situation with

Mrs. Lintern a week before the great production of 'St. George.' Matters had now advanced and the situation was developed.

"That old fool, Gollop!" he said. "He goeth now as if the eye of the world was on him. You'd think Shaugh Prior was the hub of the universe, as the Yankees say, and that Thomas was the lynch-pin of the wheel!"

"He's found time to see which way the cat's jumping, all the same," answered Mrs. Lintern. "Full of Ned Baskerville and our Cora now! Says that 'tis a case and everybody knows it."

Nathan shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes — well, these things can't be arranged for them. The young must go their own road. A splendid couple they make without a doubt. They'll look magnificent in their finery at the revel. But I wish nephew Ned wasn't quite so vain of his good parts."

Cora herself entered at this moment, and had that to say which awoke no small interest in her mother.

"I've fallen in with Mark," she said; "and I was passing, but he spoke and 'tis all well, I believe. He was very quiet and you might almost say cheerful."

"Thank the Lord he's got over it then," answered Nathan; but Mrs. Lintern doubted.

"Don't feel too sure of that. He ban't one to wear his heart on his sleeve, anyway."

"He's took it surprising well, everybody says," said Cora, in a voice that made the innkeeper laugh.

"Poor Mark! — but I see Cora here isn't too pleased that he's weathered the storm so easily. She'd have liked him to be a bit more down in the mouth."

"I'm very pleased indeed," she answered. "You never gave better advice than when you bade me write

to him. The truth is that he's not made to marry. Tenor bell be enough wife for him."

"I wonder who'll ring it when you're wedded," mused Nathan. "No man have touched that bell since my nephew took it up."

"Time enough. Not that he'd mind ringing for me, I believe. Such a bloodless thing as he is really —no fight in him at all seemingly."

"If you talk like that we shall begin to think you're sorry he took you at your word," said Mr. Baskerville; but Cora protested; and when he had gone, she spoke more openly to her mother.

"'Tis a very merciful escape for me, and perhaps for him. I didn't understand my own mind; and since he's took it so wonderful cool, I guess he didn't know his mind either."

"You haven't heard the last of him. I've met the like. For my part I'd rather hear he was daft and frantic than so calm and reasonable. 'Tis the sort that keep their trouble out of sight suffer most."

"I'd have forgiven him everything but being a coward," declared Cora fiercely. "What's the use of a man that goes under the thumb of his father? If he'd said 'I hate my father, and I'll never see him again, and we'll run away and be married and teach him a lesson,' then I'd have respected him. But not a bit of it. And to take what I wrote like that! Not even to try and make me think better of it. A very poor-spirited chap."

Mrs. Lintern smiled, not at the picture of Mark's sorrows, but at her daughter's suggestion, that she would have run away with the young man and married him and defied consequences.

"How we fool ourselves," she said. "You think you would have run with him. You wouldn't have run a yard, Cora. The moment you found things

was contrary with his father, you was off him — why? Because your first thought always is, and always has been, the main chance. You meant to marry him for his money — you and me know that very well, if none else does."

The daughter showed no concern at this attack.

"I shan't marry a pauper, certainly. My face is all the fortune you seem like to give me, and I'm not going to fling it away for nought. I do set store by money, and I do long to have some; and so do every other woman in her senses. The only difference between me and others is that they pretend money ban't everything, and I say it is, and don't pretend different."

"Milly Luscombe be going to stick to Rupert Baskerville, however, though 'tis said his father will cut him off with a shilling if he leaves Cadworthy."

Cora sniffed.

"There'll be so much the more for the others then. They Baskerville fathers always seem to stand in the way of their sons when it comes to marrying. Mr. Nathan would have been different if he'd had a family. He understands the young generation. Not that Vivian Baskerville will object to Ned marrying, for Ned told me so."

"No doubt he'll be glad for Ned to be prevented from making a fool of himself any more."

Mrs. Lintern's daughter flushed.

"He's long ways off a fool," she said. "He ban't the man who comes all through the wood and brings out a crooked stick after all. He knows what women are very well."

"Yes; and I suppose Mr. Waite knows too?"

"He's different to Ned Baskerville. More cautious like and prouder. I'd sooner have Ned's vanity than t'other's pride. What did he want to be up here talking with you for? — Timothy Waite I mean."

"No matter."

"'Twasn't farming, anyway?"

"Might have been, or might not. But, mark this, he's a very shrewd, sensible young man and knows his business, and how to work, and the value of money, and what it takes to save money. He'll wear well — for all you toss your head."

"He's a very good chap. I've got nothing against him; but ——"

"But t'other suits you better? Well, have a care. Don't be in no hurry. Get to know a bit more about him; and be decent, Cora. 'Twouldn't be decent by no means to pick up with him while everybody knows you've just jilted his cousin."

"Didn't do no such thing. I've got my side and 'tisn't over-kind in you to use such a word as that," answered her daughter sharply. "However, you never did have no sympathy with me, and I can't look for it. I'll go my way all the same, and if some fine day I'm up in the world, I'll treat you better than you've treated me."

But Mrs. Lintern was not impressed by these sentiments. She knew her daughter's heart sufficiently well.

"'Twill be a pair of you if you take Ned Baskerville," she said. "And you needn't pretend to be angered with me. You can't help being what you are. I'm not chiding you; I'm only reminding you that you must be seemly and give t'other matter time to be forgot. You owe the other man something, if 'tis only respect — Mark, I mean."

"He'll be comforted mighty quick," answered Cora. "Perhaps he'll let his father choose the next for him; then 'twill work easier and everybody will be pleased. As for me, I'm in no hurry; and you needn't drag in Ned's name, for he haven't axed me yet and very like he'd get 'no' for his answer if he did."

Mrs. Lintern prepared to depart and Cora spoke again.

"And as for Mark, he's all right and up for anything. He chatted free and friendly about the play and the dresses we're going to wear. He's to be prompter on the night and 'tis settled that the schoolmaster from Bickleigh be going to be Doctor, because there's none in this parish will do it. And Mark says that after the play's over, he shall very like do the same as Rupert and leave home."

"He said that?"

"Yes; and I said, 'None can ring tenor bell like you, I'm sure.' Then he looked at me as if he could have said a lot, but he didn't."

"I hope he will go and see a bit of the world. 'Twill help him to forget you," said her mother.

"Ned's the only one of 'em knows the world," answered Cora. "He's travelled about a bit and 'tis natural that his father should put him before all the others and see his sense and learning. When parson's voice gave out, Ned read the lessons — that Sunday you was from home — and nobody ever did it better. He's a very clever man, in fact, and his father knows it, and when his father dies, the will is going to show what his father thinks of him."

"He's told you so, I suppose?"

"Ned has, yes. He knows I'm one of the business-like sort. I'd leap the hatch to-morrow if a proper rich man came along and asked me to."

"Remember you're not the first — that's all," said her mother. "If you take him and he changes his mind and serves you like he's served another here and there, you'll have a very unquiet time of it, and look a very big fool."

"'Twas all nonsense and lies," she answered. "He made the truth clear to me. He never took either of

them girls. They wasn't nice maidens and they rushed him into it — or thought they had. He's never loved any woman until ——"

Cora broke off.

"Shan't tell you no more," she continued. "'Tis no odds to you — you don't care a button — and I shall soon be out of your house, anyhow."

"Perhaps; but I shall be a thought sorry for all them at Cadworthy Farm if you take Ned and set up wife along with his family," answered her mother. "Hard as a cris-hawk[1] you be; and you'll have 'em all by the ears so sure as ever you go there."

"You ax Mrs. Hester Baskerville if I be hard," retorted Cora. "She'll tell that I'm gentle as a wood-dove. I don't show my claws without there's a good reason for it. And never, unless there is. Anyway, I'm a girl that's got to fight my own battles, since you take very good care not to do a mother's part and help me."

"You shall have the last word," answered Mrs. Lintern.

[1] *Cris-hawk* — kestrel.

CHAPTER XV

SOME weeks after Christmas had passed, Mr. Joseph Voysey and others met at 'The White Thorn' and played chorus to affairs according to their custom. The great subject of discussion was still the play. It had been enacted twice to different audiences, and it proved but an indifferent success. Everybody agreed that the entertainment promised better than its ultimate performance. At rehearsal all went well; upon the night of the display a thousand mishaps combined to lessen its effect.

Joe Voysey summed up to Thomas Gollop, who sat and drank with him.

"What with us all being so busy about Christmas, and the weather, and Nathan here getting a cold on his chest and only being able to croak like a frog, and parson losing his temper with Head at the last rehearsal, and other things, it certainly failed. 'Tis a case of least said soonest mended; but I'm keeping this mask of the French Eagle what I wore, for it makes a very pretty ornament hanged over my parlour mantelshelf."

"In my judgment," declared Nathan, "'twas Jack Head that played the mischief with the show. After parson cooled him down at rehearsal, I allow he went a bit lighter on his part and didn't act quite so forcible, but well I knew he was saving it up for the night; and so he was. 'Twas all Jack all the time, and even when he was supposed to be dead, he must still keep growling to make the people laugh. He's had a right down row with Mr. Masterman since."

"A make-strife sort of man; and yet a cheerful man; and yet, again, a very rebellious man against the powers," said Voysey.

"Well, 'tis over and it shows, like everything else do, how much may grow out of little," added Nathan. "Just a bit of fun at Christmas, you'd say, wouldn't leave no very great mark, yet — look at it — how far-reaching."

"It's brought the eyes of the county on us, as I said it would," replied the parish clerk. "The Rural Dean was here afterwards and took his luncheon at the vicarage and came to the church to see the font-cover; but Nancy Mumford — maiden to the vicarage — waits at table, and she told my sister that his reverence said to Mr. Masterman that we'd fallen between two stools and that the performance was a sort of a mongrel between a modern pantomime and the old miracle play, and that the masks and such-like were out of order. And Miss Masterman was a bit acid with the Rural Dean and said, to his face, that if he'd only had to see the thing through, as they had, she was sure that he'd be more charitable like about it."

"Us shan't have no more play-acting, mark me," foretold Joe Voysey; then others entered the bar, among them being Saul Luscombe from Trowlesworthy and Heathman Lintern. The warrener was on his way home and stayed only for a pint and a few friendly words.

"You should hear Jack Head tell about the play," he said.

"And he should hear us tell about him," answered Voysey. "Jack, so near as damn it, spoilt the play. In fact, innkeeper here thinks he did do so."

"He vows that he saved the whole job from being a hugeous failure. And young farmer Waite swears 'twas Miss Lintern as the Princess that saved it; and

Mr. Ned, your nephew, Nathan — he swears 'twas himself that saved it."

"And I think 'twas I that saved it," declared Thomas. "However, enough said. 'Tis of the past and will soon be forgot, like a dead man out of mind."

"That's where you're wrong, Tom," said Heathman. "You can't forget a thing so easy. Besides, there's all that hangs to it. There's Polly Baskerville, that was one of Cora's maidens in the play, got engaged to be married on the strength of it — to Nick Bassett — him as waited on the Turkish Knight. And now — bigger news still for me and mine. Cora's taken Ned Baskerville!"

"I knew it was going to happen," admitted Nathan. "'Tis a very delicate thing, for she's only broken with the man's cousin a matter of a few months. Her mother asked me about it a bit ago."

"You've got to remember this," said Heathman. "I should have been the first to make a row — me being Cora's only brother and the only man responsible to look after her. I say I should have been the first to make a row, for I was terrible savage with her and thought it hard for her to throw over Mark, just because his father was an old carmudgeon. But seeing how Mark took it ——"

"To the eye, I grant you that; but these quiet chaps as hide their feelings often feel a lot more than they show," said Mr. Luscombe.

"He was hard hit, and well I know it, for his father told me so," continued Nathan Baskerville. "My brother, Humphrey, in a sort of way, blamed me and Mrs. Lintern, and, in fact, everybody but himself. One minute he said that Mark was well out of it, and the next he got to be very jealous for Mark and told me that people were caballing against his son. I go in fear of meeting my brother now, for when he hears

that Cora Lintern is going to take Ned Baskerville, he'll think 'twas all a plot and he'll rage on Mark's account."

"'Tis Mark that I fear for," said Heathman; then Gollop suddenly stopped him.

"Hush!" he cried, and held up his hand. After a brief silence, however, he begged young Lintern to proceed.

"Beg your pardon," he said. "I thought I heard something."

"I fear for Mark," continued the other, "because I happen to know that he still secretly hoped a bit. I don't like my sister Cora none too well, and I reckon Mark's worth a million of her, and I told him I was glad to see him so cheerful about it. 'You'm very wise to keep up your pecker, Mark,' I said to the man; 'because she'm not your sort really. I know her better than you do and can testify to it.' But he said I mustn't talk so, and he told me, very private, that he hadn't gived up all hope. Poor chap, I can let it out now, for he knows 'tis all over now. 'While she's free, there's a chance,' he told me. 'I won't never think,' he said, 'that all that's passed between us is to be blown away at a breath of trouble like this.' That's how he put it, and I could see by the hollow, wisht state of his eyes and his nerves all ajolt, that he'd been through a terrible lot."

"He'd built on her coming round, poor fellow—eh? That's why he put such a brave face on it then," murmured Nathan.

Then Voysey spoke again.

"As it happens, I can tell you the latest thing about him," he said. "I was to work two days agone 'pon the edge of our garden, doing nought in particular because the frost was got in the ground and you couldn't put a spade in. But I was busy as a bee according to

my wont — tying up pea-sticks I think 'twas, or setting a rat-trap, or some such thing — when who should pass down t'other side of the hedge but Mark Baskerville? Us fell into talk about the play, and I took him down to my house to show him where my granddarter had stuck the mask what made me into the French Eagle. Then I said there were changes in the air, and he said so too. I remarked as Rupert Baskerville had left Cadworthy and gone to work at the Lee Moor china clay, and he said 'Yes; and I be going too.' 'Never!' I said. 'What'll Mr. Humphrey do without you?' But he didn't know or care. 'Who ever will ring your bell when you're gone?' I asked him, and ——"

Thomas Gollop again interrupted.

"'Tis a terrible queer thing you should name the bell, Joe," he said, "for I'll take my oath somebody's ringing it now!"

"Ringing the bell! What be talking of?" asked Heathman. "Why, 'tis hard on ten o'clock."

"Yet I'm right."

At this moment Saul Luscombe, who had set out a minute sooner, returned.

"Who's ago?" he asked. "The bell's tolling."

They crowded to the door, stood under the clear stillness of night, and heard the bell. At intervals of a minute the deep, sonorous note throbbed from aloft where the church tower rose against the stars.

"There's nobody sick to death that I know about," said Nathan. "'Twill be Mark ringing, no doubt. None touches tenor bell but him."

Mr. Luscombe remounted his pony.

"Cold bites shrewd after your bar, Nathan. Good night, souls. Us shall hear who 'tis to-morrow."

The bell tolled thrice more; then it stopped.

"Bide a minute and I'll come back," said Mr.

Gollop. "I can't sleep this night without knowing who 'tis. A very terrible sudden seizure, for certain. Eliza may know."

He crossed the road and entered his own house, which stood against the churchyard wall. They waited and he returned in a minute.

"She knows nought," he said. "Mark dropped in a little bit ago and axed for the key. 'What do 'e want in belfry now, Mr. Baskerville?' she axed him. 'Passing bell,' he said; and Eliza was all agog, of course, for 'twas the first she'd heard of it. 'What's the name?' she said; but he answered nought and went down the steps and away. A minute after the bell began."

"'Tis over now, anyway. I'll step across and meet Mark," said Mr. Baskerville.

One or two others accompanied him; but there was no sign of the ringer. Then, led by Gollop, they entered the silent church and shouted.

"Where be you, Mark Baskerville, and who's dead?" cried Gollop.

In the belfry profound silence reigned, and the ropes hanging from their places above, touched the men as they groped in the darkness.

"He's gone, anyway," declared Nathan. Then suddenly a man's boot rubbed against his face. The impact moved it a moment; but it swung back heavily again.

The innkeeper yelled aloud, while Gollop fetched a lantern and lighted it. Then they found that Mark Baskerville had fastened a length of stout cord to the great rope of the tenor bell at twenty feet above the floor. He had mounted a ladder, drawn a tight loop round his neck, jumped into the air, and so destroyed himself.

CHAPTER XVI

CERTAIN human dust lay in a place set apart from the main churchyard of St. Edward's. Here newborn babies, that had perished before admission into the Christian faith, were buried, because the ministers of the church felt doubtful as to the salving of these unbaptised ones in another world. The spot was known as 'Chrisomers' Hill,' a name descended from ancient use. By chrisom-cloths were first understood the anointed white garments put upon babes at baptism; and afterwards they came to mean the robes of the newly-baptised. Infants were also shrouded in them if they perished a month after baptism; while a chrisom-child, or chrisomer, signified one who thus untimely died.

Among these fallen buds the late vicar of the parish had also buried a woman who took her own life; and Thomas Gollop, nothing doubting but that here, and only here, the body of Mark Baskerville might decently be laid, took it upon himself to dig the grave on Chrisomers' Hill. But the ground was very hard and Thomas no longer possessed his old-time strength of arm. Therefore a young man helped him, and during the intervals of labour, the elder related incidents connected with past interments. Some belonged to his own recollection; others had been handed down by his father.

"And touching these childer took off afore the holy water saved 'em, my parent held the old story of the Heath Hounds," concluded Thomas. "And there might be more in it than us later-day mortals have a

right to deny. For my father solemnly swore that he'd heard 'em in winter gloamings hurrying through the air, for all the world like a flock of night-flying birds, and barking like good-uns in full cry after the Dowl. 'Tis Satan that keeps 'em out of the joys of Paradise; but only for a time, you must know, because these here babbies never done a stroke of wrong, being too young for it; and therefore, in right and reason, they will be catched up into Heaven at the last."

"But no doubt 'tis different if a human takes their own life," said the young man.

"Different altogether," declared Mr. Gollop. "To take your own life be to go to a party afore you'm invited — a very presumpshuss and pushing thing, to say the least. No charity will cover it. For argument's sake, we'll say as I cut my throat, and then I stand afore the Throne of Grace so soon as the life be out of me. 'Who be you?' says the A'mighty. 'Thomas Gollop, your Reverence,' says I. Then they fetch the Books and it all comes out that I've took the law of life into my own hands and upset the record and made a far-reaching mess of everything; because you must know you can't live to yourself alone, and if you lay hands on your body, you be upsetting other lives beside your own, and making trouble in the next world so well as this. So down I go to the bad place — and very well I should deserve it. I can't be sure of Masterman, but he'll hardly have the face to treat this rash corpse like a God-fearing creature, I should hope. The parish will ring with it if he do."

"Crowner's sitting now over to 'The White Thorn,'" said Tom's assistant.

"Yes; and since Jack Head's 'pon the jury, there'll be no paltering with truth. I hate the man and have little good to say of him as a general thing; but there's no nonsense to him, and though he's oftener wrong than

any chap I know, he won't be wrong to-day, for he told me nought would shake him. 'Tis the feeble-minded fashion to say that them that kill themselves be daft. They always bring it in so. Why? Because the dust shall cheat justice and get so good Christian burial as the best among us. But Head won't have that. He's all for bringing it in naked suicide without any truckling or hedging. The young man was sane as me, and took his life with malice aforethought; and so he must lie 'pon Chrisomers' Hill with the doubtfuls, not along with the certainties."

As he spoke somebody approached, and Nathan Baskerville, clad in black, stood beside them.

"I want you, Gollop," he said. "Who are you digging for here? 'Tis long since Chrisomers' Hill was opened."

"For Mark Baskerville," answered the sexton stoutly. "'Tis here he's earned his place, and here he'll lie if I'm anybody."

Nathan regarded Thomas with dislike.

"So old and so crooked-hearted still!" he said. "I'm glad you've had your trouble for your pains, for you deserve it. Poor Mark is to be buried with his mother. You'd better see about it, and pretty quick too. The funeral's the day after to-morrow."

"I'll discourse with the reverend Masterman," answered Thomas; "and I'll also hear what the coroner have got to say."

"You're a nasty old man sometimes, Gollop, and never nastier than to-day. As to Mr. Masterman, you ought to know what stuff he's made of by this time; and as for the inquest, 'tis ended. The verdict could only be one thing, and we decided right away."

"What about Jack Head?"

"Jack's not a cross-grained old fool, whatever else he may be," answered the innkeeper. "I convinced him

in exactly two minutes that my nephew couldn't have been responsible for what he did. And everybody but a sour and bitter man, like you, must have known it. Poor Mark is thrown over by a girl — not to blame her, either, for she had to be true to herself. But still he won't believe that she's not for him, though she's put it plain as you please in writing; and he goes on hoping and dreaming and building castles in the air. Always dreamy and queer at all times he was — remember that. Then comes the crashing news for him that all is over and the maiden has taken another man. Wasn't it enough to upset such a frail, fanciful creature? Enough, and more than enough. He hides his trouble and his brain fails and his heart breaks — all unseen by any eye. And then what happens? He rings his own passing-bell! Was that the work of a sane man? Poor chap — poor chap! And you'd deny him Christian burial and cast him here, like a dog, with the poor unnamed children down under. I blush for you. See to his mother's grave and try and be larger-hearted. 'Tis only charity to suppose the bitter cold weather be curdling your blood. Now I'm off to my brother Humphrey, to tell him what there is to tell."

Then Mr. Nathan buttoned up his coat and turned to the grinning labourer.

"Don't laugh at him," he said. "Be sorry for him. 'Tis no laughing matter. Fill up that hole and take down yonder slate at the far end of the Baskerville row, and put everything in order. Our graves be all brick."

He departed and Mr. Gollop walked off to the vicarage.

A difficult task awaited Nathan, but he courted it in hope of future advantage. He was terribly concerned for his brother and now designed to visit him. As yet Humphrey had seen nobody.

Vivian had called at Hawk House the day after Mark's death, but Mrs. Hacker had told him that her master was out. On inquiries as to his state, she had merely replied that he was not ill. He had directed that his son's body should remain at the church, and he had not visited Shaugh again or seen the dead since the night that Mark perished.

Now Nathan, secretly hoping that some better understanding between him and Humphrey might arise from this shattering grief, and himself suffering more than any man knew from the shock of it, hastened to visit his bereaved brother and acquaint him with the circumstances of the inquest.

Humphrey Baskerville was from home and Nathan, knowing his familiar haunt, proceeded to it. But first he asked Mrs. Hacker how her master fared.

The woman's eyes were stained with tears and her nerves unstrung.

"He bears it as only he can bear," she said. "You'd think he was a stone if you didn't know. Grinds on with his life — the Lord knows at what cost to himself. He lighted his pipe this morning. It went out again, I grant you; still it shows the nature of him, that he could light it. Not a word will he say about our dear blessed boy — done to death — that's what I call it — by that picture-faced bitch to Undershaugh."

"You mustn't talk like that, Susan. 'Twas not the girl's fault, but her cruel misfortune. Be honest, there's a good creature. She's suffered more than any but her mother knows. No, no, no — not Cora. The terrible truth is that Humphrey's self is responsible for all. If he'd met Mrs. Lintern's daughter in a kinder spirit, she'd never have feared to come into the family and never have thrown over poor Mark. But he terrified her to death nearly, and she felt a marriage with such a man's son could never come to good."

Mrs. Hacker was not following the argument. Her mind had suffered a deep excitation and shock, and she wandered from the present to the past.

"The ups and downs of it — the riddle of it — the indecency of it — life in general, I mean! To think that me and you not above a week agone were dancing afore the public eye — Father Christmas and Mother Dorothy. How the people laughed! And now ——"

She stared stupidly before her and suddenly began repeating her part in the play.

> "Here come I, old Mother Dorothy,
> Fat, fair, plump and commodity.
> My head is big, my body is bigger:
> Don't you think I be a handsome old figure?"

"And the quality said I might have been made for the part!"

"You're light-headed along of all this cruel grief," answered Nathan. "Go in out of this cold wind, Susan, and drink a stiff drop of spirits. I suppose my brother is up on the tor?"

"Yes, he's up there; you can see him from the back garden. Looks like an image — a stone among the stones, or a crow among the crows. But the fire's within. He was terrible fond of Mark really, though he'd rather have had red-hot pincers nip him than show it."

"I'll go up," declared the innkeeper.

He climbed where his brother appeared against the skyline and found Humphrey bleakly poised, standing on a stone and looking into the eye of the east wind. His coat was flapping behind him; his hat was drawn over his eyes; his nose was red and a drop hung from it. He looked like some great, forlorn fowl perched desolate and starving here.

"Forgive me for coming, brother, but I hadn't the heart to keep away. You wouldn't see me before; but

you must now. Get down to the lew side of these stones. I must speak to you."

"I'm trying to understand," answered the other calmly. "And the east wind's more like to talk sense to me than ever you will."

"Don't say that. We often court physical trouble ourselves when we are driven frantic with mental trouble. I know that. I've suffered too in my time; though maybe none of the living — but one — will ever know how much. But 'tis senseless to risk your own life here and fling open your lungs to the east wind because your dear son has gone. Remember 'tis no great ill to die, Humphrey."

"Then why do you ask me to be thoughtful to live?"

"I mean we mustn't mourn over Mark for himself — only his loss for ourselves. He's out of it. No more east wind for him. 'Tis our grief that's left. His grief's done; his carking cares be vanished for ever. You mustn't despair, Humphrey."

"And you pass for an understanding man, I suppose? And tell me not to despair. Despair's childish. Only children despair when they break their toys. And grown-up children too. But not me. I never despair, because I never hope. I made him. I created him. He was a good son to me."

"And a good man every way. Gentle and kind — too gentle and kind, for that matter. Thank God we're all Christians. Blessed are the meek. His cup of joy is full, and where he is now, Humphrey, his only grief is to see ours."

"That's the sort of stuff that's got you a great name for a sympathetic and feeling man, I suppose? D'you mean it, or is it just the natural flow of words, as the rain falls and the water rolls down-hill? I tell you that he was a good man, and a man to make

others happy in his mild, humble way. Feeble you might call him here and there. And his feebleness ended him. Too feeble to face life without that heartless baggage!"

"Leave her alone. You don't understand that side, and this isn't the time to try and make you. She's hit hard enough."

Humphrey regarded his brother with a blazing glance of rage. Then his features relaxed and he smiled strangely at his own heart, but not at Nathan.

"I was forgetting," he said. Then he relapsed into silence.

Presently he spoke again.

"My Mark wasn't much more than a picture hung on a wall to some people. Perhaps he wasn't much more to me. But you miss the picture if 'tis taken down. I never thought of such a thing happening. I didn't know or guess all that was hidden bottled up in him. I thought he was getting over it; but, lover-like, he couldn't think she'd really gone. Then something — the woman herself, I suppose — rubbed it into him that there was no more hope; and then he took himself off like this. For such a worthless rag — to think! And I suppose she'll hear his bell next Sunday without turning a hair."

"Don't say that. She's terribly cut up and distressed. And I'm sure none — none will ever listen to his bell like we used to. 'Twill always have a sad message for everybody that knew Mark."

"Humbug and trash! You'll be the first to laugh and crack your jokes and all the rest of it, the day that girl marries. And the bell clashing overhead, and the ashes of him in the ground under. Let me choose the man — let me choose the man when she takes a husband!"

Nathan perceived that his brother did not know the

truth. It was no moment to speak of Cora and Ned Baskerville, however.

"I've just come from the inquest," he said. "Of course 'twas brought in 'unsound mind.'"

"Of course — instead of seeing and owning that the only flash of sanity in many a life be the resolve and deed to leave it. He was sane enough. No Baskerville was ever otherwise. 'Tis only us old fools, that stop here fumbling at the knot, that be mad. The big spirits can't wait to be troubled for threescore years and ten with a cargo of stinking flesh. They drop it overboard and ——"

His foot slipped and interrupted the sentence.

"Take my arm," said the innkeeper. "I've told Gollop that Mark will lie with his mother."

The other seemed suddenly moved by this news.

"If I've misjudged you, Nathan, I'm sorry for it," he said. "You know in your heart whether you're as good as the folk think; and as wise; and as worthy. But you catch me short of sleep to-day; and when I'm short of sleep, I'm short of sense, perhaps. To lie with his mother — eh? No new thing if he does. He lay many a night under her bosom afore he was born, and many a night on it afterwards. She was wonderful wrapped up in him — the only thing she fretted to leave. How she would nuzzle him, for pure animal love, when he was a babby — like a cat and her kitten."

"He promised her when he was ten years old — the year she died — that he would be buried with her," said Nathan. "I happen to know that, Humphrey."

"Few keep their promises to the dead; but he's dead himself now. Burrow down — burrow down to her and put him there beside her — dust to dust. I take no stock in dust of any sort — not being a farmer. But his mother earned heaven, and if he didn't, her

tears may float him in. To have bred an immortal soul, mark you, is something, even if it gets itself damned. The parent of a human creature be like God, for he's had a hand in the making of an angel or a devil."

"Shall we bring Mark back to-night, or shall the funeral start from the church?" asked Nathan.

They had now descended the hill and stood at Humphrey's gate.

"Don't worry his bones. Let him stop where he is till his bed's ready. I'm not coming to the funeral."

"Not coming!"

"No. I didn't go to my wife's, did I?"

"Yes, indeed you did, Humphrey."

"You're wrong there. A black hat with a weeper on it, and a coat, and a mourning hankercher was there — not me. Bury him, and toll his own bell for him, but for God's sake don't let any useful person catch their death of cold for him. Me and his mother — we'll mourn after our own fashion. Yes, her too: there are spirits moving here for the minute. In his empty room she was the night he finished it. Feeling about she was, as if she'd lost a threepenny piece in the bed-tick. I heard her. 'Let be!' I shouted from my chamber. 'The man's not there: he's dead — hanged hisself for love in the belfry. Go back where you come from. Belike he'll be there afore you, and, if not, they'll tell you where to seek him.'"

He turned abruptly and went in; then as his brother, dazed and bewildered, was about to hurry homeward, the elder again emerged and called to him.

"A word for your ear alone," he said as Nathan returned. "There's not much love lost between us, and never can be; but I thank you for coming to me to-day. I know you meant to do a kindly thing.

My trouble hasn't blinded me. Trouble ban't meant to do that. Tears have washed many eyes into clear seeing, as never saw straight afore they shed 'em. I'm obliged to you. You've come to me in trouble, though well you know I don't like you. 'Twas a Christian thing and I shan't forget it of you. If ever you fall into trouble yourself, come to me, innkeeper."

"'Twas worth my pains to hear that. God support you always, brother."

But Humphrey had departed.

Nathan drifted back and turned instinctively to Undershaugh rather than his own house. Darkness and concern homed there also; Cora had gone away to friends far from the village, and the Linterns all wore mourning for Mark.

Priscilla met her landlord and he came into the kitchen and flung his hat on the table and sat down to warm himself by the fire.

"God knows what's going to happen," he said. "The man's mind is tottering. Never such sense and nonsense was jumbled in a breath."

After a pause he spoke again.

"And poor old Susan's half mad too. An awful house of it. Nothing Humphrey may do will surprise me. But one blessed word he said, poor chap, though whether he knew what he was talking about I can't guess. He thanked me for coming to him in trouble — thanked me even gratefully and said he'd never forget it. That was a blessed thing for me to hear, at such a time."

The emotional man shed tears and Priscilla Lintern ministered to him.

CHAPTER XVII

HUMPHREY BASKERVILLE had sought for peace by many roads, and when the final large catastrophe of his life fell upon him, it found him treading a familiar path.

He had conceived, that only by limiting the ties of the flesh and trampling love of man from his heart, might one approximate to contentment, fearlessness, and rest. He had supposed that the fewer we love, the less life has power to torment us, and he had envied the passionless, sunless serenity of recorded philosophers and saints. He was glad that, at a time when nature has a large voice in the affairs of the individual and sways him through sense, he had not incurred the customary responsibilities.

Chance threw him but a single child; and when the mother of the child was taken from him, he felt a sort of dreary satisfaction that fate could only strike one more vital blow. He had dwarfed his affections obstinately; he had estimated the power of life to inflict further master sorrows, and imagined that by the death of one human creature alone could added suffering come. So at least he believed before the event. And now that creature was actually dead. Out of the ranks of man, the bullet had found and slain his son.

Yet, when Mark sank to the grave and the first storm of his passing was stilled in the father's heart, great new facts and information, until then denied, fell upon Humphrey Baskerville's darkness and showed him that even this stroke could not sever his spirit from its kind.

The looked-for deliverance did not descend upon him; the universal indifference did not come. Instead his unrest persisted and he found the fabric of his former dream as baseless as all dreaming. Because the alleged saint and the detached philosopher are forms that mask reality; they are poses only possible where the soul suffers from constitutional atrophy or incurred frost-bite.

They who stand by the wayside and watch, are freezing to death instead of burning healthily away. Faulty sentience is not sublime; to be gelded of some natural human instinct is not to stand upon the heights. He who lifts a barrier between himself and life, shall be found no more than an unfinished thing. His ambition for detachment is the craving of disease; his content is the content of unconsciousness; his peace is the peace of the mentally infirm.

A complete man feels; a complete man suffers with all his tingling senses; a complete man smarts to see the world's negligences, ignorances, brutalities; he endures them as wrongs to himself; and, because he is a complete man, he too blunders and adds his errors to the sum of human tribulation, even while he fights with all his power for the increase of human happiness.

The world's welfare is his own; its griefs are also his. He errs and makes atonement; he achieves and helps others to achieve; he loathes the cloister and loves the hearth. He suffers when society is stricken; he mourns when the tide of evolution seems to rest from its eternal task 'of pure ablution round earth's human shores'; he is troubled when transitory victories fall to evil or ignorance; in fine, he lives. And his watch-tower and beacon is not content, not peace, but truth.

He stands as high above the cowardly serenity of any anchorite or chambered thinker, as the star above

glimmering and rotten wood in a forest hidden; and he knows that no great heart is ever passionless, or serene, or emparadised beyond the cry of little hearts, until it has begun to grow cold. To be holy to yourself alone is to be nought; a piece of marble makes a better saint; and he who quits the arena to look on, though he may be as wise as the watching gods, is also as useless.

Dimly, out of the cloud of misery that fell upon him when his son perished, Baskerville began to perceive and to feel these facts. He had consoled himself by thinking that the only two beings he loved in the whole world were gone out of it, and now waited together in eternity for his own arrival thither.

Their battle was ended; and since they were at rest, nothing further remained for him to trouble about. But the anticipated peace did not appear; no anodyne poured into his soul; and he discovered, that for his nature, the isolated mental standpoint did not exist.

There could arise no healing epiphany of mental indifference for him. He might be estranged, but to exile himself was impossible. He must always actively hate what he conceived to be evil; he must always suspect human motives; he must always feel the flow and ebb of the human tide. Though his own rocky heart might be lifted above them, the waves of that sea would tune its substance to throb in sympathy, or fret it to beat with antagonism, so long as it pulsed at all.

This discovery surprised the man; for he had believed that a radical neutrality to human affairs belonged to him.

He attributed the sustained restlessness of his spirit to recent griefs and supposed that the storm would presently disappear; and meantime he plunged into a minor whirlwind by falling into the bitterest quarrel with his elder brother.

Nathan indeed he had suffered to depart in peace; but as soon as the bereaved father learned that Vivian's son, Ned, was engaged to Cora, and perceived how it was this fact that had finally killed hope in Mark and induced the unhappy weakling to destroy himself, his rage burst forth against the master of Cadworthy; and when Vivian called upon the evening of the funeral to condole with Humphrey, an enduring strife sprang up between them.

"I'm come as the head of the family, Humphrey," began the veteran, "and it ban't seemly that this here terrible day should pass over your head without any of your kith and kin speaking to you and comforting you. We laid the poor young man along with his mother in the second row of the Baskerville stones. My word! as Gollop said after the funeral, 'even in death the Baskervilles be a pushing family!' Our slates stretch pretty near from the church to the churchyard wall now."

"Thank you for being there," answered his brother. "I couldn't have gone, because of the people. There was no maiming of the rite — eh?"

"Not a word left out — all as it should be. Eight young men carried him, including a farmer or two, and my son Ned, and Heathman Lintern, and also my son Rupert — though where he came from and where he went to after 'twas ended, I don't know, and don't care. He's left me — to better himself — so he thinks, poor fool! A nice way to treat a good father."

"You've lost a son, too, then — lost him to find him again, doing man's work. You'll live to know that he was right and you were wrong. But my son — my mind is turned rather rotten of late. After dark I can't get his dead face out of my eyes. Nought terrible, neither — just, in a word, 'dead.' He broke his neck — he didn't strangle himself. He knew what he

was about. But there, I see it. Gone — and none knows what he was to me. He never knew himself; and for that matter I never knew myself, neither — till he was gone."

"We never do know all other folk mean to us — not until they be snatched off. If anybody had told me how my son Rupert's going would have made such a difference, I'd not have believed it."

"Then think of this house. You feel that — you with your store of children and Rupert, after all, but gone a few miles away to go on with his work and marry the proper wife you deny him. But me — nought left — nought but emptiness — no 'Good morning, father'; no 'Good night, father'; no ear to listen; no voice to ask for my advice. And I'd plotted and planned for him, Vivian; I'd made half a hundred little secret plans for him. I knew well the gentle fashion of man he was — not likely ever to make a fighter — and so I'd cast his life in a mould where it could be easy. He'd have come to know in time. But he never did know. He went out of it in a hurry, and never hinted a whisper of what he was going to do. If he'd but given me the chance to argue it out with him!"

"We've acted alike, me and you," answered his brother; "and it ban't for any man to dare to say that either of us was wrong. When the young fall into error, 'tis our bounden duty to speak and save 'em if we've got the power. I don't hold with Rupert ——"

"No need to drag in your affairs. That case is very different. I did not treat my son like a child; I did not forbid him to marry and turn him out of doors."

"Stay!" cried Vivian, growing red, "you mustn't speak so to me."

"What did you do if it wasn't that? No proud

man can stay under the roof where he's treated like a child. But Mark — did I forbid? No. I only made it clear that I despised the woman he'd set his heart on. I only told him the bitter truth of her. If she'd clung to him through all, would I have turned him away or refused him? Never. 'Twould have made no difference. 'Twas not me kept 'em apart — as you are trying to keep apart your son and Saul Luscombe's niece — trying and failing. 'Twas the proud, empty, heartless female herself that left him."

"I'll hear nought against her," answered Vivian stoutly. "She's not proud and she's not empty. She's a very sensible woman, and this cruel piece of work has been a sad trouble to her. She left Mark because she felt that you hated her, and would torment her and make her married life a scourge to her back. Any woman with proper sense and self-respect would have done the like. 'Twas you and only you choked her off your son, and 'tis vain — 'tis wicked to the girl — to say now that 'twas her fault. But I've not come to speak these things — only I won't hear lies told."

"You've heard 'em already, it seems. Who's been telling you this trash? Nathan Baskerville belike?"

"As a matter of fact 'tis my son Ned," answered Vivian. "You must surely know how things have fallen out? It happened long afore poor Mark died. Didn't he tell you?"

"He told me nought. What should he tell me? Ned he certainly wouldn't name, for he knew of all your brood I like your eldest son least — a lazy, worthless man, as all the world well knows but you."

"You shan't anger me, try as you will, Humphrey. I'm here, as your elder brother and the head of the family, to offer sympathy to you in your trouble; and

I'll ax you to leave my family alone. Young men will be young men, and as for Ned, if I be the only one that feels as I should feel to him, 'tis because I'm the only one that understands his nature and his gifts. He'll astonish you yet, and all of us. The books he reads! You wait. Soon ripe, soon rotten. He's taking his time, and if he wants a wife, 'tis only in reason that the future head of the family should have a wife; and why not? He shan't have to work as I have worked."

"A fool's word! What made you all you are? Work and the love of it. Yet you let him go to the devil in idleness."

"If you'd but suffer me to finish my speech — I say that Ned won't work as I have worked — with my limbs and muscles. He's got a brain, and the time be coming when he'll use it."

"Never."

"Anyway a settled life is the first thing, and the mind free to follow its proper bent. And I don't say 'no' to his marrying, because the case is different from Rupert's, and 'tis fitting that he should do so."

"But Rupert must not. And you pass for a just and sensible man!"

"'Tis strange — something in the Baskerville character that draws her — but so it is," continued the master of Cadworthy, ignoring his brother's last remark. "In a word, when he found she was free, my Ned took up with Cora Lintern, and she's going to marry him. But 'tis to be a full year from this sad Christmas — I bargained for that and will have it so."

"'Going to take him'? Going to take your son!" cried the other.

"She is; and I sanction it; for I found her a very different maiden to what you did."

"Going to marry Ned! Going from my Mark to your Ned!"

"'Twas settled some time ago. Mark knew it, for I myself let it out to him when I met him one day in North Wood. 'Twas but two days afore his last breath, poor fellow. Of course, I thought that he knew all about it, and as it was understood that he had got over his loss very bravely and was cheerful and happy as usual again, I made nothing of the matter, thinking that was the best way to take it."

Humphrey stared at him.

"Go on — you're letting in the light," he said.

"That's all — all save this. When I told Mark that Cora was going to wed his cousin, I saw by his face 'twas news for him. His colour faded away. Then I knew that he hadn't heard about it. Accident had kept it from him till the matter was a week old."

"And he said ——?"

"He just said something stammering like. He was a bit of a kick-hammer in his speech sometimes — nothing to name; but it would overtake him now and again if he was very much excited. I didn't catch just what the words were — something about one of the family having her, I think 'twas."

"Then he went and killed himself, and not till then. So 'twas your son after all as settled him — don't roar me down, for I'll be heard. Your son — all his work! He plotted and planned it. And lazy I thought him! And I might have known there's no such thing as laziness of mind and body both. Busy as a bee damning himself — damning himself, I tell you! A shifty traitor, a man to stab other men in the back, a knave and the vilest thing that ever bore our name. And you know it — you know it as well as I do."

"By God! this is too much," shouted out Vivian,

rising to his feet and towering over the crouching figure opposite him. "What are you made of to say such vile things of an innocent man? You see life all awry; you see ——"

"I see a hard-hearted, blind old fool," answered the other. "You let your wretched son rob you of justice and reason and sense and everything. Get hence! I'll have no more of you. But your time will come; you'll suffer yet; and this godless, useless brute — this murderer — will murder you yourself, maybe, or murder your love of living at the least. Wait and watch him a little longer. He'll bring your grey hairs with sorrow to the grave afore he's done with you — take my word for that. And as for me, I'll curse him to his dying day, and curse you for breeding him! Wait and watch what you've done and the fashion of man you've let loose on the world; and let them marry — the sooner the better — then his punishment's brewed and there's no escape from the drinking. Yes, let him eat and drink of her, for man's hate can't wish him a worse meal than that."

He ceased because he was alone. Vivian had felt a terrible danger threatening him, and had fled from it.

"My anger heaved up like seven devils in me," he told his wife afterwards. "If I'd bided a moment longer I must have struck the man. So I just turned tail and bolted afore the harm was done. Not but what harm enough be done. Mad — mad he was by the froth on his lip and the light in his eye, and them awful eyebrows twitching like an angry ape's. 'Twas more a wild beast in a tantrum than a human. 'Tis all over, and no fault of mine. I'll never speak to thicky horrible creature no more so long as I live — never. And I'll not willingly so much as set eyes upon him again."

"A very Pharaoh of a man, no doubt," declared Mrs. Baskerville. "The Lord has hardened his heart

against us; but He'll soften it in His own good time. Though for that matter 'tis difficult to see how he can be struck again. His all be took from him."

Vivian considered this saying, but it did not shake his intention.

"He's growed dangerous and desperate, and 'twill be wiser that I see him no more," he answered. "He's flung my sympathy back in my face, and that's a sort of blow leaves a bruise that a long life's self can't medicine."

"'Twill come right. Time will heal it," she told him.

But he was doubtful.

"There may not be time," he said. "The man won't live long at the gait he's going — burning away with misery, he is. And calls himself a Christian! Little enough comfort the poor soul sucks out of Christ."

Within a week of this incident Humphrey Baskerville was seeking his brother's society again — a thing of all others least likely to have happened. It fell out that he was walking as usual on the waste above Hawk House, when he saw his nephew Rupert proceeding hastily along the distant road to Cadworthy Farm. The young man noted him, left his way and approached.

"'Tis well I met you, uncle," he said. "Young Humphrey's just ridden over to you with a message from mother. Then he came on to me. There's terrible trouble at home — father, I mean. You know what he is for doing heavy work — work beyond his years, of course. He was shifting grain from the loft, and they found him fallen and insensible with a sack on top of him. I hope to God it ban't very bad. Mother sent off for me, for fear it might be a fatal

thing. And Humphrey says my name was on father's lips when they laid him to bed after doctor had gone. He said, 'This be Rupert's fault. I be driven to this heavy work along of him leaving me, and now he's killed me.' I'm sure I hope he'll call that back, for 'tis a terrible thing for me to live under if he died."

"I'll come along with you," said Mr. Baskerville; "and as to what your father may have spoken in his anger at being stricken down, pay no heed to it. He's like a silly boy over these feats of strength, and he'd have shifted the sacks just the same if you'd been there. The thing he said isn't true, and there's an end on it. He'll be sorry he uttered the word when he's better."

They hurried forward and presently stood at the door of Cadworthy.

"You'd best knock afore you enter," said the elder. "We're both in disgrace here, and come as strangers. I had a difference with your father last time we met. Ned Baskerville is tokened to that woman that killed Mark. I could not hear and keep dumb. I cursed my brother in my rage, and I owe him an apology."

Rupert knocked at the door, and his sister May answered it. Her eyelids were red with tears and her manner agitated.

"How's your father?" asked Humphrey.

"Very bad, uncle. 'Tis a great doubt if he'll get better, doctor says."

"Then be sure he will. I've come to see him."

Mrs. Baskerville appeared behind May. She was very pale, but appeared collected.

"I'm sorry — terrible sorry," she said. "I've told dear master that I'd sent for Rupert and for you, Humphrey, but he won't see neither of you. 'Tis no good arguing about it in his state; but I pray God he'll change his mind to-morrow."

Rupert kissed his mother.

"Bear up," he said. "With his strength and great courage he'll weather it, please God. You know where I am — not five mile away. I'll come running the moment he'll see me."

"And ask him to forgive his brother. I'm sorry I said the things I did," declared Humphrey Baskerville.

A pony cart drove up at this moment and Eliza Gollop alighted from it.

She carried a large brown-paper parcel, and a corded box was lifted out after her.

"I've come," she said. "Doctor left a message for me as he went back along, and I was ready as usual. How's the poor man going on? I'm afraid you must not be very hopeful — so doctor said on his way back; but where there's life and me there's always hope, as my brother Thomas will have it."

Humphrey and his nephew walked slowly away together. At the confines of the farmyard Rupert turned out of the road a little and pointed upwards to a window that faced the east. A white blind was drawn down over it.

"That's father's room," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

JACK HEAD entered the bar of 'The White Thorn,' and was glad to find Nathan Baskerville at home.

"I don't want to drink, I want to talk," he said.

"Then come into my room, Jack," answered the innkeeper, and Mr. Head followed him into a little chamber known as 'Mr. Nathan's office.'

"I've got together another five pounds," explained the labourer, "and I know you'll do for me what you do for all — put it by with the rest. We come to you, Mr. Baskerville, and we trust you with our savings, for why? Because you ban't a lawyer. You're the poor man's bank, as I always say, and I only hope you get your fair share of good for all the money you put away to goody for us."

"That's all right, Jack."

Mr. Nathan produced a ledger and turned over the pages.

"This makes twenty to you, and interest three-ten."

He wrote a receipt and handed it to the other.

"Wish I'd got your 'mazing head for figures; and so I should if I'd been properly eggicated."

"I shall have some pretty big money on my hands before long, I'm afraid," said Nathan gloomily. "Doctor called coming back from Cadworthy. 'Tis all over with my poor brother, I'm afraid."

"My stars — that mighty man to drop amongst us! Well, he's had a good life and full share of fortune."

"His own folly has finished him too — that's the worst of it. Would be doing the young men's work, and did it once too often."

"A fall, so they say. But none appear to know the rights seemingly."

"Simple enough. Vivian was carrying oats, and slipped his foot on a frosty place. Down he came with the sack on his back. He went insensible; but by the time young Humphrey, who was along with him, had fetched help, Vivian had come to again. He crept in the house and up to his bed. 'Tis nought,' he told 'em, 'just a shake up; I'll be right in the morning.' But he wasn't. He couldn't rise, and felt a lot of pain to the inwards. Doctor won't be sure what's gone, but he reckons that the poor man's ruptured spleen or liver. Anyway, he's going. Fading out fast — and suffering, too."

"Such a mountain as him. I suppose they can't reach the evil. And will all his affairs come down on your shoulders?"

"That is so. Everything will have to be done by me. The boys know nought of business. He's a rich man — I know that."

"A great responsibility, but no doubt you're up to it."

"Not that it will be so difficult either," added Nathan, "because all his money was invested pretty much as I advised. His wife is joint executor with me; but she knows nothing. I could have wished he'd drawn my brother Humphrey in and made him responsible; but he never was sure of Humphrey, I'm sorry to say; and, as bad luck would have it, just before Vivian met with this trouble, he had a terrible quarrel with Humphrey — so terrible, in fact, that when Humphrey called, after the accident, farmer wouldn't see him."

"Nor his son neither. I took hope from that, for if a man's well enough to keep up such a hatred against his own kin, it looks as if he was likely to get better."

"I'm afraid not. I'm going over this afternoon to see him and hear about his will. Please God he'll prove softer. 'Twould be a cruel thing if he clouded his great name for justice at the end by striking from the grave."

"Where should he strike?"

"Rupert, I mean. He took Rupert's going terrible to heart, and when Rupert wrote very properly last Christmas and offered his father his respects, and said as he meant to marry Saul Luscombe's niece next spring, Hester tells me that my brother pretty well threw the doors out of windows. He went to Tavistock next day, and there's an ugly fear in his wife's mind that he had his will out and tinkered it. I shall ax him this evening, and try to get him to see sense."

Elsewhere Hester Baskerville spoke with her husband, and found that he already knew what the doctor had advised her to tell him.

"You can spare speech," he said, "I saw it in the man's eyes; and I knew it afore he came, for that matter. I'm not going to get better. I'm going to die."

"There's hope still, but not enough to ——"

"I'm going to die. Where's Eliza Gollop?"

"I'll call her."

"You'd best to hot up the milk he ordered. I'll try to let it down if I can. And give Eliza pen, ink, and paper."

"Don't be writing. Lie still and let her read to you."

"You needn't be afraid. My writing was done to Tavistock afore I came to grief. You're all right, and all that have treated me as a father should be treated are all right. There's tons of money. Where's Ned to?"

"He's going to ride in to the surgery for the medicine to stop that cruel pain."

"Let Humphrey get it. And send Ned to me instead of Eliza Gollop. 'Tis him I want — not her."

She pressed his hand and kissed him, and went out. The huge form lay still, breathing slowly. A fly, wakened out of hibernation by the heat of the fire, buzzed about his face. He swore, and his scarlet nightcap bobbed as he moved painfully.

Ned came in, little liking to be there. He lacked the spirit and mental courage for such a time.

"Kill this blasted fly, will 'e? Then get pen and ink. 'Tis a very old custom in our race, Ned, to write our own epitaphs when we can. I've put mine off and off, along of a silly fancy about doing it; but the time be ripe, and my head's clear."

"Don't say things like that, father. You may get better yet. He's going to fetch another doctor to-morrow."

"Let him fetch twenty — they can do nought. 'Tis the last back-heel that none ever stand against. I don't grumble. I'm only sorry that 'twas my own son has struck his father. Death don't matter, but 'tis a bitter death to know the fruit of your loins —— His work I was doing: let him know that — his work. An old man doing a young man's work. If Rupert had been here, he'd have been shifting they sacks. Let none deny it. 'Tis solemn truth."

Ned knew the extreme falsity of this impression, but he made no effort to contradict his father.

"What I done to Tavistock a month agone, I might have undone afore I went," continued the sick man. "But not now — not when I remember 'twas his wickedness has hurried me into my grave. Where be my son Nathan's ship to now?"

"Don't know, father."

"You ought to know, then. Him that I would see I can't see; and him that would see me I won't see."

"You might see him, father, for his peace."

"'Peace'! Damn his peace! What peace shall he have that killed his own father? He don't deserve to look upon me again, and he shan't—living nor dead—mark that. Tell your mother that when I'm dead, Rupert ban't to see me. Only the coffin lid shall he see."

The old man snorted and groaned. Then he spoke again.

"Have you got pen and ink ready?"

"Yes, father."

"Turn to the first leaf of the Bible, then, and see my date."

Ned opened the family register and read the time of his father's birth.

"Born June, died January—and just over the allotted span. Let me see, how shall the stone read? There's good things on the Baskerville stones. 'Sacred to the memory of Vivian Baskerville, of Cadworthy Farm, in this parish, yeoman.' You can begin like that."

"Shall you say anything about being champion of the west country at wrestling?" asked Ned.

"No. That ban't a thing for the grave—at least, perhaps it might be. Your uncle, the great musicker, had a fiddle cut 'pon his stone very clever. If 'twas thought that the silver belt could be copied upon my slate—— But no, let that pass, 'tis but a small matter."

"Better leave it to us to think about. Uncle Nathan will know best."

"So he will, then. And we must work in a rhyme, for certain; but first, I've got a fine thought to put down."

Ned waited, pen in hand; then his father continued to dictate:—

"'What it pleased the great I AM'—capital letters for I AM—'what it pleased the great I AM to give me in shape of a body in eighteen hundred and eighteen, it likewise pleased Him to call home again in eighteen hundred and eighty-nine.' How does that sound?"

"Splendid, father."

"Now there's the rhyme to follow. I want to work in 'breath' and 'death' if it can be done. You ought to be able to do it, seeing all the learning you've had and what it cost."

Ned frowned and puzzled. Then, while Vivian groaned, he had an inspiration, and wrote rapidly.

"How's this, father?" he asked. "It just flashed in my mind." Then he read:—

> "Three score years and ten I kept my breath;
> So long I felt no fear of Death."

"It goes very well, but I haven't got no more fear of death now than ever I had. You must alter that."

Silence fell again and Ned mended his rhyme.

"How would this answer?" he asked:—

> "Three score years and ten I kept my breath
> And stood up like a man and feared not Death."

"Yes, that's very good indeed. Now us must make two more lines to finish—that is, if we can be clever enough to think of 'em."

Ned's pen squeaked and stopped, squeaked and stopped again. He scratched out and wrote for several minutes.

"Listen to this, father," he said at length, "'tis better even than the first." He read once more:—

> "Yet now I'm gone, my thread is spun,
> And I know my God will say, 'Well done!'"

"The cleverness of it! And didn't I always say you

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were crammed up with cleverness? But the last line won't do."

"'Tis the best of all, father."

"Won't do, I tell you. Who be I to know my God will pat me on the back? Little enough to be pleased with — little enough. Put, 'I hope my God will say, "Well done!"'"

"You may only hope, but all else know that He will," declared Ned stoutly.

As he finished writing Nathan Baskerville entered with the wife of the sufferer. Hester brought a cup of hot milk, but Vivian in his excitement would not taste until the epitaph had been rehearsed.

"Ned's thought," he said. "And I helped him. And I shall be proud to lie under it — any man might. Give me the paper."

His son handed it to him, and he read the rhyme aloud with great satisfaction.

> "Three score years and ten I kept my breath,
> And stood up like a man and feared not Death;
> Yet now I'm gone, my thread is spun,
> And I hope my God will say, 'Well done!'"

How's that, Nat? So good as the musicker's own in my judgment."

"Splendid! Splendid!" declared Nathan. He was much moved. He blew his nose and went to the window awhile. Then, Vivian being relieved and fed, the innkeeper returned to him and sat beside him. Hester Baskerville and her son went out and left the brothers together.

"Us'll talk business, Nat," said the sick man presently.

"And first I want you to know that you'll have more than your trouble for your pains. 'Tis a common thing with dying people to leave a lot of work

behind 'em for somebody to do, and never a penny piece of payment for doing it. But not me. There's fifty pound for you, Nat. I've scrimped in reason all my life. I've ——"

He was stopped by pain.

"Ban't far off, I reckon. Can't talk much more. You'll do all right and proper. I trust my widow and childer to you. My boy Ned be no good at figures, so I look to you."

"To the very best of my power I'll do by them all. Leave that now. You're the sort who isn't taken unprepared. I want to say a word about Rupert, if you'll let me."

"Not a word — not a breath! That book is closed, not to be opened no more. You don't want to add another pang to my end, do you? Let me forget him. I've forgiven him — that's enough."

"'Tisn't to forgive him, my dear Vivian, if you have cut him off with nought."

"I'll hear no more!" cried the other. "I'll think no more of him, nor yet of Humphrey. 'Tis they have cruelly and wickedly wronged me. 'Tis Rupert have brought me here, and hastened me into my grave ten years afore the time, and he'll have to answer to his God for it."

"Leave it then — leave it and talk of other things. You'll like Ned to take Cora Lintern? You'll like that? And I shall do something for Cora. I'm very fond of her."

They talked for half an hour. Then Vivian cried out for his wife and Nathan left him.

That evening Dennis Masterman came to see the farmer, and on the following day he called again. None knew what passed between them, but it seemed that by some happy inspiration the clergyman achieved what Vivian Baskerville's wife and brother had failed

to do. Dennis had heard, from the master of 'The White Thorn,' that the sick man was passing at enmity with his brother and with his son; but he strove successfully against this determination and, before he left Cadworthy, Vivian agreed to see his relations. The day was already waning when Ned Baskerville himself rode to fetch Rupert, and the lad Humphrey hastened to Hawk House.

Eliza Gollop told the sequel to her brother afterwards.

"It got to be a race towards the end, for the poor man fell away all of a sudden after three o'clock. Nature gived out, as it will sometimes, like a douted candle. He'd forgot all about everything afore he died. Only his grave stuck in his mind, and I read over the epitaph till I was weary of it. Then he went frightened all of a sudden. 'To think o' me lying there alone among dead folk of evenings, wi' nought but the leather-birds[1] squeaking over the graves,' he said. 'You won't be there, my dear,' I told him. 'You'll be up where there's no sun nor yet moon, bathing for evermore in the light of righteousness.' Then he flickered and he flickered, and wandered in his speech, and the last words I could catch was, 'What's all this pucker about? I shall be my own man again in a day or two.' He was hollow-eyed and his nose growed so sharp as a cobbler's awl, poor dear, and I knowed he'd soon be out of his misery. His wife was along with him when he died, her and the two daughters; and poor Hester — Hester I call her, for she let me use the Christian name without a murmur — she was cut in half listening to his death-rattle o' one side and hoping to hear her son Rupert gallop up 'pon the other. 'Twas a race, as I say; but Rupert had been long ways off to work, and Ned had to find

[1] *Leather-birds* — bats.

him, and what with one thing and another, his father had been out of the world twenty good minutes afore he came. He runned up the stairs white from the clay-works. But there was only more clay on the bed to welcome him. I left 'em at that sacred moment, as my custom is, and went down house, and was just in time to see Humphrey Baskerville ride up in hot haste on his one-eyed pony. 'How is it with him?' he said, getting off very spry. 'I hope, as he could send for me, that he finds hisself better.' 'Not at all,' I answered him. 'The poor man sent because he was worse, and felt himself slipping away.' 'Then I'd best be quick,' he replied to me; and I broke it to him that 'twas too late. 'He's gone, sir,' I said. 'Like the dew upon the fleece he be gone. Half an hour ago he died, and suffered very little at the end, so far as a mortal but experienced woman can tell you.' He stared slap through me, in that awful way he has, then he turned his back and got up on his beast and rode off without a word or a sign. Lord, He knows what that old pony must have thought of it all. 'Twas sweating and staggering, and, no doubt, full of wonder and rage at being pushed along so fast."

END OF FIRST BOOK

Book II

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

UPON the highway between Cadworthy and the border village of Cornwood there stands an ancient granite cross. For many years the broken head reposed in the heather; then it was lifted upon the pedestal again and the vanished shaft restored. To north and south the white road sweeps by it; easterly tower Penshiel and Pen Beacon, and westerly rolls Shaugh Moor.

Here, upon a day one year after the death of Vivian Baskerville, there met two of his sons, and the conversation that took place between them served roughly to record the development of their affairs, together with the present situation and future interests of the family.

Ned Baskerville was riding home from Cornwood, and his brother Rupert, knowing that he must come this way, sat by St. Rumon's Cross, smoked his pipe and waited. The younger had found himself forgotten when his father's will came to be read. It was a pious fiction with Hester Baskerville that her husband had striven, when too late, against his own hasty deed. She believed that near his end the dying man attempted to repair this wrong. She declared that his eyes and his mutterings both spoke to that effect.

But the fact of disinheritance was all that remained for Rupert to face, and in his bitterness he had turned from his family and continued to toil at the china-clay

works, despite his mother's entreaties and Ned's handsome propositions.

Now, however, the case was altered. After nine months of this unwisdom, Milly prevailed with Rupert to go back to Cadworthy and take her with him. His mother was thankful to welcome him home, and Ned did what he might to further the prospect.

Rupert stood within sight of marriage, and he and his wife were presently to dwell at Cadworthy. Then control of the farm would be made over by Ned Baskerville to his brother.

Now Rupert, in working clothes, sat by the cross. Opportunity to see Ned was not always easy, for the elder lived a life of pure pleasure and occupied much of his time from home. He was only concerned to spend money, but showed no interest in the sciences of administering and making it.

He rode up presently, stopped, and, bending over, shook hands with his brother, but did not dismount.

"Hullo! Don't often see you smoking and taking your ease. Look at my new mare. Isn't she a beauty? But Lord knows what Uncle Nathan will say when I come down upon him for the cash. And I've got another unpleasant surprise in store for him. I've bought a horse for Cora. It'll be my wedding-present to her, but she may as well have it now."

"Pity we couldn't have all been married together; then one fuss and flare up and expense would have done for the lot of us."

"I shouldn't have minded; but she didn't take to the idea at all. Wants to have a first-prize wedding all to herself. And about time too. I'm sick of waiting."

As a matter of fact Ned had found no difficulty in suspense. With possession of money, life's boundaries considerably enlarged for him, and he became a person of increased importance.

Cora was not jealous, and finding Ned extremely generous, she continued content with the engagement. The present year was to see her married, however; but when Nathan Baskerville suggested a triple wedding, Cora objected very strongly. She intended that her nuptials should be in a style considerably grander than those of Milly Luscombe, or Polly Baskerville; but she finally promised Ned to marry him during the following autumn.

"A nice mare," admitted Rupert; "she's got a temper, though — won't carry beer. I know the man who used to own her. She very near broke his neck for him the night after Cornwood revel."

"The horse isn't foaled that will ever throw me, I believe."

"I reckon not. Well, I'm here to meet you, Ned. I want to run over the ground. You hate business so bad that 'tis difficult to talk about it with you; but, all the same, as a man with money you must think a bit."

"Uncle Nathan thinks for me. He was paid to. Didn't father leave him fifty pounds to be trustee, or whatever 'tis?"

"But you never will look ahead. Uncle Nathan, since that bad bout of health last winter, isn't what he was. Clever enough, I grant; but he has got his own affairs, and his own worries too, for that matter. Everything be safe and proper in his hands; but suppose he fell ill? Suppose he was to die?"

"You're such a beggar for supposing. Never meet troubles half-way — that's my rule, and I've found it work very well too. I trust Uncle Nathan like the rest of the world trusts him. I sign his blessed papers and I get my quarter's allowance very regular, with a bit of money over and above when I want it, though he grumbles. I ask for no more but to be allowed to enjoy life as long as I can."

"I'm going to do this anyway," said Rupert. "I'll tell you my hopes and plans. 'Tis right and wise to make plans and look ahead and set yourself a task. And my task be to get Cadworthy Farm away from you for my own in twenty years from the time I go there."

"I shan't object — be sure of that. 'Tisn't likely I'd make hard terms with my own brother. You go in as my tenant at just what rent you please to pay in reason; and you pay me as much over and above the rent as you can afford till the price of the farm is polished off. And mother stops with you, and May stops with you. Mother has her allowance and May has hers, so they'll be no charge on you. And I stop too — till I'm married."

"That's all clear, then."

"Yes; and what I'm going to do is this. It seems there are things called sleeping partnerships — jolly convenient things too. All you do is to find a good, safe, established business that wants a bit of cash. And you put your cash in, and just go to the business once in a blue moon and sign your name in a book or two and draw your fees, and there you are! Uncle Nathan's on the look-out for some such a thing for a bit of my money. And I hope it will be in Plymouth for choice, because Cora's frightfully keen to be near Plymouth. She wants to make some decent woman pals, naturally. It's ridiculous such a girl messing about in a hole like Shaugh. She hinted at a shop, but I won't have that for a moment."

"All the same, I don't see why you shouldn't try and look out for something that would give you a bit of work. Work won't hurt her or you. You must be pretty well sick of doing nothing by this time, I should think."

"Far from it," declared Ned. "I find myself quite

contented. I shall turn my hand to work presently. No hurry that I can see. I'm learning a lot, remember that. A great learner I am. The first use of money is to learn the world, Rupert. That's where that old fool at Hawk House has messed up his life. No better than a miser, that man. A spendthrift may be a fool, but a miser always is. And so it comes back to the fact that Uncle Humphrey's a fool, as I always said he was — a fool and a beast both."

"He's different enough from Uncle Nathan, I grant you — can't be soft or gentle; but he's no fool, and though he pretends he's not interested in people, he is. Things slip out. Look how he reads the newspapers."

"Yet now, for very hatred of all human beings — it can't be for anything else — 'tis rumoured he'll leave Hawk House and get away from the sight of roads even. Susan Hacker told mother, not a week agone, that he was getting restless to go farther off. Pity he don't go and stick his head in Cranmere, and choke himself, and leave you and me and a few other dashing blades to spend his money. We ought to be his heirs — all of us. But we shan't see the colour of his cash, mark me."

"You won't. He hates your way of life. But he's got no quarrel with the rest of us. You never know with a man like him. I'm going over to him now; and I've got a tale of a chap that's broke his legs. He may give me five shillings for the man's wife. He's done it before to-day. 'Tis in him to do kind things, only there's no easy outlet for 'em. Keeps his goodness bottled up, as if he was afraid of it."

"You've got his blind eye, I reckon," said Ned. "It's all up with me anyway. I look t'other way when I pass him. He'll never forgive me for marrying Cora."

"Well, you'd best to go on and not keep your horse dancing about no longer."

Ned galloped off, and his brother, having sat a little longer by St. Rumon's Cross, rose and struck over Shaugh Moor in the direction of Humphrey Baskerville's dwelling.

The old man was expecting his nephew and came upon the waste to meet him. They had not spoken together for many days and Rupert was glad to see the elder again.

A year had stamped its record upon Humphrey Baskerville, and the significance of his son's death might now be perceived. Mark's passing left a permanent scar, but the expected callosity of spirit by no means overtook the sufferer.

Man, if he did not delight him, bulked upon his mind as the supreme experience. It was an added tribulation that, upon his brother's estrangement and death, one of the few living beings with whom he enjoyed the least measure of intimacy had dropped out of his life.

And now he became increasingly sensitive to the opinion of the people and developed a morbidity that was new.

Mrs. Hacker was his frank intelligencer, and more than once he smarted to hear her tell how sensible men had spoken ill of him.

Now he fell into talk with Rupert and uttered the things uppermost in his mind.

"Well enough in body, but sometimes I doubt if my brain's all it used to be. Mayhap in the head is where I'll go first."

Rupert laughed. "Not much fear of that, uncle."

"You must know," answered the other, "that every man in this life has to suffer a certain amount of injustice. From the king on his throne to the tinker

in his garret, there are thorns stuffed in all pillows. Human nature misunderstands itself at every turn, and the closest, life-long friends often catch their secret hearts full of wonder and surprise at each other. But I — I've had more than my share of that. The injustice that's heaped upon me is insufferable at times. And why? Because I don't carry my heart on my sleeve, and won't palter with truth at the world's bidding."

"'Tis only fools laugh at you or grumble at you."

"You're wrong there," answered Humphrey. "The scorn of fools and the snarl of evil lips are a healthy sign. There are some men and some dogs that I would rather bark at me than not. But how is it that wise men and understanding men hold aloof and say hard things and look t'other way when I pass by?"

"Lord knows," answered Rupert. "They'm too busy to think for themselves, I suppose, and take the general opinion that you're rather — rather unsociable. You do many and many a kind thing, but they ban't known."

"No I don't. I can't — 'tisn't my nature. Kind things are often terrible silly things. Leave your Uncle Nathan to do the kind things. He did a kind thing when my son died; and I felt it. For warmth of heart there never was such another. The trouble that man takes for people is very fine to see. I'm not saying he's wise. In fact, I don't think he is wise. To do other folks' work for 'em and shelter 'em from the results of their own folly is to think you know better than God Almighty."

"He's wonderful good, I'm sure. A godsend to my mother. Taken all the business over for her. When father died ——"

"Leave that. Keep on about his character," said Humphrey. "There's nought so interesting to a man

like me as burrowing into human nature and trying the works. Now, in your Uncle Nathan you see one that has the cleverness to make nearly every human being like him and trust him. But how does he get his hold on the heart? Is it by shutting his eyes to what people really are, like I shut my ears to Jack Head's arguments against the Bible; or is it by sheer, stupid, obstinate goodness, that can't see the weakness and folly and wickedness and craft of human beings?"

"He puts a large trust in his fellow-creatures," answered Rupert. "He believes everybody is good till he's proved 'em bad."

Humphrey nodded.

"True enough, and I'll tell you what that means in Nathan. The real secret of sympathy in this world is to be a sinner yourself. There's no end to the toleration and forgiveness and large-mindedness of people, if they know in their own hearts that they be just as bad. A wise man hedges, and never will be shocked at anything — why? Because he says, 'I may be found out too, some day.'"

He broke off and his nephew spoke.

"I know you're just as kind, really. By the same token I've come begging to-day. A poor Cornwood chap has had a bad accident. Market merry he was and got throwed off his pony. He's in hospital with both legs broke and may not recover, and his wife and four children ——"

"What about his club?"

"He wasn't a member of a club."

"What's his name?"

"Coombes."

"Drunk too? And you ask me to take my money and help that sort of man? But I won't."

"Perhaps, in strict justice, he don't deserve it; but ——"

"Did you ask your Uncle Nathan for him?"

"Yes. It shows the difference between you, I suppose."

"He gave?"

"He gave me ten shillings. There's a nice point to argify about. Which of you was right, Uncle Humphrey — you or Uncle Nat? You can't both be right."

"We can both be right and both be wrong," answered the old man.

"Uncle Nat was preaching at the chapel a bit ago, afore he had his illness; and me and Milly went to hear him."

"He preaches, does he?"

"Now and again — to work off his energy, he says. But never no more will he. His voice won't stand it, he says. He chose for his text a question, and he said 'twas a simple and easy thing, afore we took any step in life, to ax ourselves and say, what would the Lord do?"

"Simple enough to ask — not so simple to answer."

"He seemed to think 'twas as simple to answer as to ask."

"His brain isn't built to see the difficulties. Jack Head laughs at all these here Tory Christians. He says that a man can no more be a Tory and a Christian than he can walk on water. He says, flat out, that Christ was wrong here and there — right down wrong. Mind, I don't say so; but Head will argue for it very strong if you'll let him."

"Uncle Nat wouldn't hear of that."

"Nor would I. I've got as much faith as my brother. And as to what Christ would do or would not do in any given case, 'tis a matter for very close reasoning, because we act only seeing the outside of a puzzle; He would act seeing the inside. To say that

we always know what the Lord would do, is to say we're as wise as Him. To go to the Bible for an answer to trouble is right enough though. 'Tis like a story I read in a wise book a few nights agone; for I've taken to reading a terrible lot of books lately. It told how two fellows fell out and fought like a pair of martin-cats over a bit of ground. Each said 'twas his, and presently they carried their trouble to a wise king, as reigned over a near nation, and was always happy to talk sense to anybody who had the time to listen. So to the neighbour kingdom they went, and yet never got to the king at all. And why not? Because, so soon as they were in his land, they found the spirit and wisdom of him working like barm in bread throughout the length and breadth of the place. They saw peace alive. They saw the people living in brotherly love and unity and understanding. They saw the religion of give and take at work. They saw travellers yielding the path to each other; they saw kindness and goodness and patience the rule from the cradle to the grave; and they felt so terrible ashamed of their own little pitiful quarrel that they dursn't for decency take it afore the throne, but made friends there and then and shared the strip of earth between 'em. And so 'tis with the Bible, Rupert: you bring a trouble into the Lord's kingdom and you'll find, in the clear light shining there, that it quickly takes a shape to shame you."

"'Tis pretty much what Uncle Nat said in other words. But didn't it ought to make you give me ten shillings for Coombes?"

"'Tisn't for us to stand between the State and its work."

"But his wife and children?"

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children. Who are we to come between God Almighty and His laws?"

Rupert shrugged his shoulders.

"Christ Almighty would have done — what?" asked Mr. Baskerville.

Rupert reflected.

"He'd have done something, for certain. Why, of course! He'd have healed the man's broken legs first!"

"And that's what mankind is doing as best it can."

"And if the man dies?"

"Then the State will look after his leavings."

"You're justice itself," said Rupert; "but man's justice be frosty work."

"That's right enough. Justice and mercy is the difference between God and Christ. The one's a terrible light to show the way and mark the rock and point the channel through the storm; but 'twill dazzle your eyes if you see it too close, remember. And t'other's to the cold heart what a glowing fire be to the cold body."

"And I say that Uncle Nathan's just that — a glowing, Christlike sort of man," declared the younger fervently.

"Say so and think so," answered his uncle. "He stands for mercy; and I'll never say again that he stands for mercy, because he knows he'll stand in need of mercy. I'll never say that again. And I stand for justice, and hope I'll reap as I have sowed — neither better nor worse. But between my way and Nathan's way is yet another way; and if I could find it, then I should find the thing I'm seeking."

"The way of justice and mercy together, I suppose you mean?"

"I suppose I do. But I've never known how to mix 'em and keep at peace with my own conscience. Justice is firm ground; mercy is not. Man knows

that very well. We may please our fellow-creatures with it; but for my part, so far as I have got till now, I'm prone to think that mercy be God's work only — same as vengeance is. For us 'tis enough that we try to be just, and leave all else in higher hands. Life ban't a pretty thing, and you can't hide its ugliness by decorating it with doubtful mercies, that may look beautiful to the eye but won't stand the stark light of right."

"Justice makes goodness a bit hard at the edges, however," answered his nephew. "And when all's said, if mercy be such treacherous ground, who can deny that justice may give way under us too now and again?"

They now stood at the door of Hawk House.

"Enter in," said Mr. Baskerville. "You argue well, and there's a lot in what you say. And words come all to this, as the rivers come all to the sea, that we know nothing, outside Revelation. And now let's talk about your affairs. When is your marriage going to be? Has Milly Luscombe said she wants me to come to it? Answer the truth."

CHAPTER II

DENNIS MASTERMAN took the opportunity that offered after a service to meet his parish clerk and perambulate the churchyard. For the vicar's sister had pointed out that the burying-ground of St. Edward's was ill-kept and choked with weeds.

Overhead the bells made mighty riot. Two weddings had just been celebrated, and the ringers were doing their best.

"With spring here again, this place will be a scandal," said Dennis. "You must set to work in earnest, Gollop, and if it's more than you can do single-handed, you'd better get help."

"Hay is hay," answered the other; "and the Reverend Valletort was above any fidgets like what some people suffer from nowadays. He had the churchyard hay as his right in his opinion, and, given a good year, us made a tidy little rick for him. 'All flesh is grass,' he used to say in his wise fashion, 'and grass is not the less grass because it comes off a man's grave.'"

"I think differently. To make hay in a churchyard, Thomas, is very bad form, and shows a lack of proper and delicate feeling. Anyway, there's to be a thorough clean-up. We've got a lot of very interesting graves here, and when people come and ask to see the churchyard I don't like wading through a foot of weeds. Where's the famous tomb with the music book and bass viol on it? I wanted to show it to a man only last week, and couldn't find it."

Mr. Gollop led the way and indicated a slate amid the Baskerville monuments.

"There 'tis. A fiddle and an open book; and the book actually had a bit of the Old Hundredth — the music, I mean — scratched on it when first 'twas set up. But time have eaten that off, I believe. He was a fine fiddler in the days afore the organs was put in the church, and then he had to go; and he soon died after the joy of playing on Sundays was taken from him. He made up his verse himself."

Mr. Gollop drew back the herbage from this slate and read out the rhyme half hidden beneath.

"'Praises on tombs are to no purpose spent,
A man's good name is his own monument.'

"But a good name don't last as long as a good slate, when all's said. There's Vivian Baskerville's stone, you see. 'Tis a great addition to the row, and cost seven pounds odd. And there lieth the suicide, as should be yonder if justice had been done. But Humphrey Baskerville don't mean to take his place in the family row. Like him, that is. Won't even neighbour with his fellow dust."

"You oughtn't to repeat such nonsense, Gollop."

"Nonsense or no nonsense, 'tis the truth. Here's the place he's chosen, and bought it, too, right up in this corner, away from everybody; and his gravestone is to turn its back upon t'other dead folk — like he's always turned his back upon the living."

Mr. Gollop indicated a lonely corner of the churchyard.

"That's where he's going to await the trump."

"Well, that's his business, poor man. He's a good Christian, anyway."

"If coming to church makes him so, he may be; but Christian is as Christian does in my opinion. Show me a man or beast as be the better for Humphrey Baskerville, and I'll weigh up what sort of Christian he may be."

"Judge nobody; but get this place respectable and tidy. No half measures, Gollop. And you'll have to work out all those unknown mounds with a pair of shears. They are running together, and will disappear in a year or two. And that pile of broken slates in the corner had better be carted away altogether. You ought to know the graves they belong to, but of course you don't."

"No, I don't, and more don't any other living man. I ban't God Almighty, I believe. 'Tis Miss Masterman have put you on to harrying me out of my seven senses this way, and I wish she'd mind her own business and let me mind mine."

"No need to be insolent. I only ask you to mind your own business. If you'd do that we should never have a word."

Mr. Gollop grunted rudely. When conquered in argument he always reserved to himself, not the right of final speech, but the licence of final sound. On these occasions he uttered a defiant, raucous explosion, pregnant with contempt and scorn, then he hurried away. At times, under exceptional stress, he would also permit himself an offensive gesture before departing. This consisted in lifting his coat-tail and striking the part of his person that occurred beneath it. But such an insult was reserved for his acquaintance; obviously it might not be exploited against the vicar of the parish.

Now Gollop marched off to 'The White Thorn,' and Masterman, turning, found that the man of whom they had recently spoken walked alone not far off. Dennis instantly approached him. It was his wish to know this member of his congregation better, but opportunity to do so had been denied. Now there was no escape for Humphrey Baskerville, because the minister extended his hand and saluted him.

"How do you do, Mr. Baskerville? Glad to see

you. A pretty pair of weddings, and two very popular young couples, I fancy."

Humphrey admitted it.

"There's no better or harder working man about here than my nephew Rupert Baskerville," he said.

"So I understand. Not much of a church-goer, though, I'm afraid. However, perhaps he'll come oftener now. The bells make the tower shake, I do believe. We've never had the tenor bell rung like your son rang it, Mr. Baskerville."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"I always fancy so; but then, I've a right to fancy so. I was his father. No doubt 'tis folly. One pair of hands can pull a rope as well as another. But 'as the heart thinketh, so the bell clinketh,' though the heart of man is generally wrong. My son would have done his best to-day, no doubt, though such was his nature that he'd sooner toll alone than peal in company."

"Are you going to the wedding breakfast?"

"Yes; not that they really want me. 'Twas only because the boys and girls wouldn't take 'no' for an answer that I go. I doubt whether they're in earnest. But I'm glad to be there too."

"Who was the fine young brown fellow in the Baskerville pew beside Mrs. Baskerville?"

"Nathan Baskerville the younger. Called after my brother, the innkeeper. He's just off the sea for a bit."

"A handsome man."

"He is for certain."

"Well, I'm very glad to meet you. I was telling Gollop that our graves are not worthy of us. We must make the churchyard tidier."

They had reached the lich-gate and Dennis held Mr. Baskerville's pony while he mounted it.

"Thank you," said the elder.

"By the way, I've never called at Hawk House, because I've been told you wouldn't care about it."

"As to that, 'tisn't whether I'd care or not, 'tis whether you ought to call or not."

"You're right. Then come I shall. How about next Friday?"

"I shall be there."

"I hear you're a great reader, Mr. Baskerville. I might lend you some of my books — and gladly would do so, if you'd care to have them."

"Thank you, I'm sure. A kindly thought in you. 'Tis no great art to think kindly; but let the thought blossom out into a deed and it grows alive. Yes, I read a lot now since my son died. Jack Head is a reading man, likewise; but he reads terrible dangerous books. He lent me one and I burnt it. Yes, I burnt it, and told him so."

"Probably you were right."

"No, I wasn't. He showed me very clearly that I was wrong. You can't burn a book. A bad book once out in the world is like a stone once flung — it belongs to the devil. Not but what Jack Head says many things that can't be answered — worse luck."

"I wish he'd bring his difficulties to me."

"You needn't wish that. *He's* got no difficulties. *He's* going with the wind and tide. 'Tis you, not him — 'tis you and me, and the likes of us — that will be in difficulties afore long. I see that plain enough. 'Tis idle to be blind. I shall die a Christian, and so will you, and so belike will your childer, if ever you get any; but all's in a welter of change now, and very like your grandchilder will think 'twas terrible funny to have a parson for a grandfather. Jack Head says they'll put stuffed curates in the British Museum afore three generations."

"A free-thought wave," said Dennis. "Be under no concern, Mr. Baskerville. Christianity is quite unassailable. Remember the Rock it's founded on."

"'Tis the rock it will split on be the thing to consider. However, if you've got any books that stand for our side, I shall thank you to lend 'em to me. Jack's had it all his own way of late."

"I'll bring some," declared Masterman.

They parted, and Humphrey trotted off on his pony.

Meantime at 'The White Thorn' a considerable gathering had met to discuss the weddings, and Nathan Baskerville, his namesake, the sailor, Heathman Lintern, Joe Voysey, and others enjoyed a morning drink. For some the entertainment was now ended, but not a few had been bidden to the feast at Cadworthy, where a double banquet was planned, and many would soon set out on foot or in market-carts for the farm.

"One may hope for nought but good of these here weddings," said Voysey. "There's only one danger in my judgment, and that is for two of the young people to set up living with the bridegroom's mother; but Rupert ban't Hester Baskerville's favourite son, I believe. If he was it certainly wouldn't work. The poor chap would be pulled in two pieces between mother and wife. However, if the mother ban't jealous of him, it may do pretty well."

"When Master Ned marries, he'll have to go a bit further off," said the innkeeper.

"How is it brother Ned ban't married a'ready?" asked the younger Nathan. "Why, 'tis more than a year agone since I heard from my sister that he was going to marry Heathman's sister, and yet nothing done. I'd make her name the day jolly quick if 'twas me."

Heathman laughed and shook his head.

"No, you wouldn't, Nat. You don't know Cora. None will hurry her if she's not minded to hurry. Ned has done what he could, and so have I—and so has my mother. But she's in no haste. Likes being engaged and making plans, getting presents, and having a good time and being important."

"The autumn will see them married, however," declared Mr. Baskerville. "I've told Master Ned that he'll have to draw in his horns a bit, for he's not made of money, though he seems to think so. 'Twill be his best economy to marry pretty quick and settle down. Never was a man with wilder ideas about money; but Cora's different. She's a woman with brains. He'll do well to hand her over the purse."

"She wants to start a shop at Plymouth," said Heathman. "A shop for hats and women's things. But Ned's against it. He says she shan't work—not while he can help it; and as he certainly won't work himself while he can help it, we must hope they've got tons of money."

"Which they have not," answered Nathan Baskerville. "And the sooner Ned understands that and gives ear to me, the better for his peace of mind."

Mr. Gollop entered at this moment. He was ruffled and annoyed.

"That man!" he moaned, "that headstrong, rash man will be the death of me yet. Of course, I mean Masterman. Won't let the dead rest in their graves now. Wants the churchyard turned into a pleasure-ground seemingly. Must be mowing and hacking and tacking and trimming; and no more hay; and even they old holy slates in the corner to be carted off as if they was common stones."

"Lie low and do nought," advised Joe Voysey. "'Tis a sort of fever that takes the gentleman off

and on. He catches the fit from his sister. She'll be down on me sometimes, with all her feathers up and everything wrong. I must set to that instant moment and tidy the garden for my dear life, till not a blade be out of place. Likes to see the grass plot so sleek as a boy's head after Sunday pomatum. But the way is to listen with all due and proper attention, as becomes us afore our betters, and then — forget it. The true kindness and charity be to let 'em have their talk out, and even meet 'em in little things here and there — if it can be done without loss of our self-respect. But we understand best. Don't you never forget that, Thomas. Where the yard and the garden be concerned, you and me must be first in the land. They be children to us, and should be treated according. We've forgot more than they ever knowed about such things."

Others came and went; Joe and Thomas matured their Fabian tactics; Nathan Baskerville, with his nephew and young Lintern, set off in a pony trap for Cadworthy. The bells still rioted and rang their ceaseless music; for these new-made wives and husbands were being honoured with the long-drawn, melodious thunder of a full five-bell 'peal.'

CHAPTER III

CORA LINTERN waited for Ned Baskerville at the fork of the road above Shaugh. Here, in the vicarage wall, the stump of a village cross had been planted. Round about stitchwort flashed its spring stars, and foxgloves made ready, while to the shattered symbol clung ivy tighter than ever lost sinner seeking sanctuary.

Upon a stone beneath sat the woman in Sunday finery, and she was beautiful despite her garments. They spoke of untutored taste and a mind ignorantly attracted by the garish and the crude. But her face was fair until examined at near range. Then upon the obvious beauty, like beginning of rust in the leaf, there appeared delicate signs of the spirit within. Her eyes spoke unrest and her mouth asperity. The shadow of a permanent line connected her eyebrows and promised a network too soon to stretch its web, woven by the spiders of discontent, upon her forehead.

Cora built always upon to-morrow, and she suffered the fate of those that do so. She was ambitious and vain, and she harboured a false perspective in every matter touching her own welfare, her own desert, and her own position in the world. She largely overrated her beauty and her talents. She was satisfied with Ned Baskerville, but had ceased to be enthusiastic about him. A year of his society revealed definite limitations, and she understood that though her husband was well-to-do, he would never be capable. The power to earn money did not belong to him, and she rated his windy optimisms and promises at their just

value. She perceived that the will and intellect were hers, and she knew that, once married, he would follow and not lead. The advantage of this position outweighed the disadvantages. She desired to live in a town, and rather favoured the idea of setting up a shop, to be patronised by the local leaders of rank and fashion. She loved dress, and believed herself possessed of much natural genius in matters sartorial.

At present Ned absolutely refused any suggestion of a shop; but she doubted not that power rested with her presently to insist, if she pleased to do so. He was a generous and fairly devout lover. He more than satisfied her requirements in that direction. She had, indeed, cooled his ardour a little, and she supposed that her common-sense was gradually modifying his amorous disposition. But another's common-sense is a weak weapon against lust, and Ned's sensual energies, dammed by Cora, found secret outlet elsewhere.

So it came about that he endured the ordeal of the lengthy engagement without difficulty, and the girl wore his fancied sobriety and self-control as a feather in her cap. When she related her achievement to Ned and explained to him how much his character already owed to her chastening influence, he admitted it without a blush, and solemnly assured her that she had changed his whole attitude to the sex.

Now the man arrived, and they walked together by Beatland Corner, southerly of Shaugh, upon the moor-edge.

Their talk was of the autumn wedding and the necessity for some active efforts to decide their domicile. Cora was for a suburb of Plymouth, but Ned wanted to live in the country outside. The shop she did not mention after his recent strong expressions of aversion from it; but she desired the first step to be such that

transition to town might easily follow, when marriage was accomplished and her power became paramount.

They decided, at length, to visit certain places that stood between town and country above Plymouth. There were Stoke and Mannamead to see. A villa was Cora's ambition — a villa and two servants. Ned's instincts, on the other hand, led to a small house and a large stable. He owned some horses and took great part of his pleasure upon them. Since possession of her own steed, however, Cora's regard for riding had diminished. It was her way to be quickly satisfied with a new toy. Now she spoke of a 'victoria,' so that when she was married she might drive daily upon her shopping and her visiting.

"The thing is to begin well," she said. "People call according to your house, and often the difference between nice blinds and common blinds will decide women whether they'll visit a newcomer or not. With my taste you can trust the outside of your home to look all right, Ned. At Mannamead I saw the very sort of house I'd like for us to have. Such a style, and I couldn't think what 'twas about it till I saw the short blinds was all hung in bright shining brass rods across the windows, and the window-boxes was all painted peacock-blue. 'I'll have my house just like that!' I thought."

"So you shall — or any colour you please. And I'll have my stable smart too, I promise you. White tiles all through. I shall have to do a bit myself, you know — looking after the horses, I mean — but nobody will know it."

"You'll keep a man, of course?"

"A cheap one. Uncle Nathan went into figures with me last week. He was a bit vague, and I was a bit impatient and soon had enough of it. 'All I want to know,' I told him, 'is just exactly what income I

can count upon,' and he said five hundred a year was the outside figure. Then, against that, you must set that he's getting a bit old and, of course, being another person's money, he's extra cautious. He admitted that if I sold out some shares and bought others, I could get pretty near another one hundred a year by it. But, of course, we've got to take a bite out of the money for furnishing and all the rest of it. My idea, as you know, is to invest a bit in a sleeping partnership, but he hasn't found anything of the sort yet, apparently. He's not the man he was at finding a bargain."

Here opened a good opportunity for her ambitions, and Cora ventured to take it.

"I wish you'd think twice about letting me start a little business. It's quite a ladylike thing, or I wouldn't offer it, but with my natural cleverness about clothes, and with all the time I've given to the fashions and all that — especially with the hats I can make — it seems a pity not to let me do it. You don't want much money to start with, and I should soon draw the custom."

"No," he said. "Time enough if ever we get hard up. I'm not going to have you making money. 'Tis your business to spend it. You'll be a lady, with your own servants and all the rest of it. You'll walk about, and pick the flowers in your garden, and pay visits; and if you do have a little trap, you can drive out to the meets sometimes when I go hunting. Why, damn it all, Cora, I should have thought you was the last girl who would ever want to do such a thing!"

"That's all you know," she said. "People who keep hat shops often get in with much bigger swells than ever we're likely to know at Mannamead, or Stoke either. They come into the shop and they see, of course, I'm a lady, and I explain that I only

keep the shop for fun, and then I get to know them. I'd make more swell friends in my hat shop than ever you do on your horse out fox-hunting."

"I know a lot of swells, for that matter."

"Ask 'em to come to tea and then you'll see if you know 'em," she said. "'Tis no use for us to be silly. We're poor people, compared to rich ones, and we always shall be, so far as I can see. We must be content with getting up the ladder a bit — and that's all I ask or expect."

"I know my place all right, if that's what you mean," answered Ned. "I'm not anxious to get in with my betters, for they're not much use to me. I'm easily satisfied. I want for you to have a good time, and I mean for myself to have a good time. You can only live your life once, and a man's a fool to let worry come into his life if he can escape from it. The great thing in the world is to find people who think as you do yourself. That's worth a bit of trouble; and when you've found them, stick to them. A jolly good motto too."

They spilt words to feeble purpose for another half-hour, and then there came an acquaintance. Timothy Waite appeared on his way from Coldstone Farm. He overtook them and walked beside them.

"I suppose you don't want company," he said, "but I'll leave you half a mile further on."

"We do want company, and always shall," declared Cora. "And yours most of all, I'm sure. We're past the silly spooning stage. In fact, we never got into it, did we, Edward?"

"You didn't," said her betrothed, "and as you didn't, I couldn't. Spooning takes two."

Mr. Waite remained a bachelor and no woman had ever been mentioned in connection with him. He was highly eligible and, indeed, a husband much to be de-

sired. He enjoyed prosperity, good looks, and a reputation for sense and industry.

Cora he had always admired, and still did so. At heart he wondered why she had chosen Ned Baskerville, and sometimes, since the marriage hung fire, he suspected that she was not entirely satisfied of her bargain and might yet change her mind.

He would have married her willingly, for there was that in her practical and unsentimental character which appealed to him. He had indeed contemplated proposing when the announcement of young Baskerville's engagement reached him. He met Cora sometimes and always admired her outlook on life. He did so now, yet knowing Ned too, doubted at heart whether the woman had arrested his propensities as completely as she asserted.

"The question on our lips when you came along was where we should set up shop," said Ned.

"A shop is what I really and truly want to set up," declared Cora; "but Edward won't hear of it — more fool him, I say. He can't earn money, but that's no reason why I shouldn't try to."

Mr. Waite entirely agreed with her.

"No reason why you shouldn't. If Cadworthy's to be handed over to Rupert and you're going to live in Plymouth, as I hear," he said, "then why not business? There's nothing against it that I know, and there's nothing like it. If I wasn't a farmer, I'd keep a shop. For that matter a farmer does keep a shop. Only difference that I can see is that he has fields instead of cupboards and loses good money through the middleman between him and his customers. I'm going to take another stall in Plymouth market after Midsummer. There's nought like market work for saving cash."

"And as nearly half our money will come from the rent that Rupert pays for Cadworthy, we shall be living

by a shop in a sense whether you pretend to or not," added Cora.

But Ned denied this. He aired his views on political economy, while Waite, who valued money, yet valued making it still more, reduced the other's opinions to their proper fatuity and laughed at him into the bargain.

Timothy's contempt for Baskerville was not concealed. He even permitted himself a sly jest or two at the expense of the other's mental endowments; and these thrusts, while unfelt by the victim, stabbed Cora's breast somewhat keenly. Even Timothy's laughter, she told herself, was more sane and manly than Ned's.

She fell into her own vice of contrasting the thing she had with the thing she had not, to the detriment of the former. It was an instinct with her to undervalue her own possessions; but the instinct stopped at herself — an unusual circumstance.

With herself and her attributes of mind and body, she never quarrelled; it was only her environment that by no possibility compared favourably with that of other people. Her mother, her sister, her brother, her betrothed, and her prospects — none but seemed really unworthy of Cora when dispassionately judged by herself.

Now she weighed Timothy's decision against Ned's doubt, his knowledge against Ned's ignorance, his sense against Ned's nonsense. She felt the farmer's allusions, and she throbbed with discomfort because Ned did not also feel them and retort upon Mr. Waite in like manner. She told herself that the difference between them was the radical difference between a wise man and a fool. Then she fell back in self-defence of her own judgment, and assured herself that, physically, there could be no comparison, and that Ned had a better heart and would make a gentler husband.

Timothy had admired her — she remembered that;

but he was caution personified and, while he had considered, Ned had plunged. She strove to see this as a virtue in Ned. Yet Timothy's old attitude to her forbade any slighting of him. She remembered very well how, when he congratulated her on her engagement, he had pointedly praised Ned for one thing alone: his precipitation. A fault at other seasons may be a virtue in the love season.

"I thought him not very clever," said Timothy on that occasion; "but now I see he was cleverer than any of us. Because he was too clever to waste a moment in getting what every other chap wanted. We learn these things too late."

He said that and said it with great significance. It comforted Cora now to remember the circumstance. Whatever else Ned might not know, he knew a good deal about women; and that would surely make him by so much a better husband. Then her wits told her the opposite might be argued from this premise. She was not enjoying herself, and she felt glad when Waite left them. Anon Ned rallied her for lengthened taciturnity and even hinted, as a jest, that he believed she was regretting her choice.

They turned presently and went back over Shaugh Moor to drink tea at the man's home. But upon the threshold Cora changed her mind. She pleaded headache and some anxiety about her health.

"I've got a cold coming — else I wouldn't be so low-spirited," she said. "I'll get back through North Wood and go to bed early."

He instantly expressed utmost solicitation and concern.

"I'll come back with you, then. If you like, I'll put in the pony and drive you," he said. But she would neither of these things.

"I shall be all right. You go in and have your tea,

and don't trouble. I'll get back by the wood path, and you'll find I shall be better to-morrow."

"'Tis that flimsy dress that lets the wind through like a net," he said. "The weather's not right for such clothes as you will wear."

But she laughed and told him to mind his own business. Then she kissed him on the cheek and went away.

He stood doubtful. First he felt moved to follow her, and then he changed his mind. He knew Cora better than she thought he did, and he was aware that at the present moment she felt perfectly well but desired to be alone.

He had not missed the significance of Mr. Waite's views on his sweetheart's mind, though he had failed to appreciate Timothy's sly humour at his own expense.

Now, therefore, he let Cora have her will and made no further effort to overtake her. He waited only until she looked back, as he knew she would; then he kissed his hand, turned, and departed.

She passed along through the forest homeward, and, when hidden in a silent place, dusted a stone and sat down to think.

A wild apple tree rose above her, half smothered in a great ivy-tod. But through the darkness of the parasite, infant sprays of bright young foliage sprang and splashed the gloomy evergreen with verdure.

Aloft, crowning this gnarled and elbowed crab, burst out a triumphant wreath of pale pink blossom — dainty, diaphanous, and curled. Full of light and pearly purity it feathered on the bough, and its tender brightness was splashed with crimson beads of the flower-buds that waited their time and turn to open.

Higher still, dominating the tree, thrust forth a crooked, naked bough or two. They towered, black,

dead, and grim above the loveliness of the living thing beneath.

From reflections not agreeable, this good sight attracted Cora and turned the tide of her thoughts. Even here the instinct of business dominated any sentiment that might have wakened in another spirit before such beauty. She gazed at it, then rose and plucked a few sprays of the apple-blossom. Next she took off her hat and began to try the effect of the natural flowers therein. Her efforts pleased her not a little.

"Lord! What a hand I have for it!" she said aloud. Then, refreshened by this evidence of her skill, she rose and proceeded to Shaugh. "I know one thing," she thought, "and that is, man or no man, I shall always be able to make my living single-handed in a town. 'Tisn't for that I want a husband. And be it as 'twill, when master Ned finds a lot more money coming in, he'd very soon give over crying out at a shop."

CHAPTER IV

HUMPHREY BASKERVILLE still sought to determine his need, and sometimes supposed that he had done so. More than once he had contemplated the possibility of peace by flight; then there happened incidents to change his mind.

Of late the idea of a home further from distracting influences had again seemed good to him. More than once he considered the advantages of isolation; more than once he rode upon the Moor and distracted his gloom with visions of imaginary dwellings in regions remote.

The folly of these thoughts often thrust him with a rebound into the life of his fellow-beings, and those who knew him best observed a rhythmic alternation in Humphrey.

After periods of abstention and loneliness would follow some return to a more sociable style of living. From a fierce hectic of mind that sent him sore and savage into the heart of the wilderness, he cooled and grew temperate again as the intermittent fever passed.

And then, when the effort towards his kind had failed by his own ineptitude and the world's mistrust, he retreated once more to suffer, and banished himself behind the clouds of his own restless soul.

Humanity has no leisure to decipher these difficult spirits; the pathos of their attempts must demand a philosophic eye to perceive it; and unless kind chance offers the key, unless opportunity affords an explanation, the lonely but hungry heart passes away unfathomed, sinks to the grave unread and unreconciled.

Inner darkness turned Baskerville to the Moor again, and he rode — where often he had already ridden: to inspect the ruin of an old dwelling upon the side of a great hill above the waters of Plym.

Brilliant summer smiled upon this pilgrimage, and as he went, he fell in with a friend, where Jack Head tramped the high road upon his way to Trowlesworthy. Jack now dwelt at Shaugh, but was head man of Saul Luscombe's farm and rabbit warren.

"A fine day," said Humphrey as he slowed his pony.

"Yes, and a finer coming," answered the other. Mr. Baskerville was quick to note the militant tone.

"Been at your silly books again, I warrant," he said. "There's one book I could wish you'd read along with t'others, Jack. 'Tis the salt to all other books, for all you scorn it."

"Bible's a broken reed, master, as you'll live to find out yet."

"No, Jack. 'Tis what makes all other writing but a broken reed. A fountain that never runs dry, I promise you. No man will ever get the whole truth out of the Bible."

"No, by Gor! Because it ban't there," said the other.

"It's there all right — hidden for the little children to find it. You bandage your eyes and then you say you can't see — a fool's trick that."

"I can see so far as you. 'Tis you put coloured spectacles on your nose to make things look as you'd have 'em. Your book be played out, master. Let the childer read it, if you like, along with the other fairy tales; but don't think grown men be going to waste their time with it. The whole truth is that the book be built on a lie. There never was no Jehovah and never will be. Moses invented Him to frighten

the folk from their naughtiness, same as you invent a scarecrow to frighten the birds from the seed. And the scarecrow works better than Jehovah did, by all accounts."

"You talk out of your narrow, bitter books, Jack."

"No need to call my books names. That's all your side can do. Why don't they try to answer 'em instead of blackguarding 'em?"

"'Tis a great danger to the poor that they begin to think so much."

"Don't you say that. Knowledge be the weapon the poor have been waiting for all these years and years. 'Tis the only weapon for a poor man. And what will it soon show 'em? It'll show 'em that the most powerful thing on this earth be the poor. They are just going to find it out; then you rich people will hear of something that will terrible astonish you."

"You're a rank Socialist, Jack. I've no patience with you."

"There you are: 'no patience!' But that's another thing we men of the soil be going to teach you chaps who own the soil. 'Patience,' you say. There's a time coming when the rich people will have to be mighty patient, I warn you! And if you're impatient —why, 'tis all one to us, for never was heard that any impatient man could stop the tide flowing."

"I believe that," said Baskerville grimly. "You'll pay us presently for teaching you, and clothing you, and helping to enlarge your minds. When you're learned enough, you'll turn round, like the snake, and bite the hand that fed you. Gratitude the common soul never knows and never will, whatever else it may learn. Knowledge is poison to low natures, and we ought to have kept you ignorant and harmless."

Jack Head stared.

"That's a pretty speech!" he said. "That's a good

healthy bit of Christian charity — eh? Why for should you ax so much credit for your side? Take me. What's the rich man done for me? A workhouse boy I was."

"And look at you now — a prosperous man and saving money. Who fed you and taught you and brought you up? The State. Society saved you; society played mother to you; and now you want to kick her. That's how you'd pay your debts. You take a base and a narrow view — dishonest too. The State have got to look after the rich as well as the poor. Why not? The poor aren't everybody. You're the sort that think no man can be a decent member of society unless he was born in a gutter. Class prejudice 'tis called, and some of the chaps who think they're the salt of the earth, stink of it."

"Class be damned," said Mr. Head. "Class is all stuff and nonsense. There are only two classes — good men and bad ones. The difference between a duke and me be difference between a pig with a ring in his nose and another without one. We'm built the same to the last bone in our bodies, and I've got more sense than half the dukes in the kingdom."

"And t'other half have got more sense than you," returned the rider. "It's summed up in a word. Class there will be, because class there must be. The poor we have always with us — you know that well enough. Your books, though they deny most things, can't deny that."

"Another of your silly Christian sayings. We have got the poor with us — but it won't be always. So long as we have the rich with us, we shall have the poor, and no longer. No longer, master! Finish off the one and you'll finish off t'other. That's a bit of home-grown wisdom, that is got from no book at all."

"Wisdom, you call it! And what power is going

to root out the rich? How are you clever folk going to alter human nature, and say to this man you shan't save your money and to this man you shall save yours? While some men and women are born to thrift and sense, and some to folly and squandering, there must be rich and poor; and while men are born to hunger for power, there must be war. These things can't be changed. And you can't say where any man can reach to; you can't put up a mark and tell your fellow-man, 'you shan't go higher than that.'"

"Granted. You can't say where they shall reach to; but you can say where they shall start from. Half the world's handicapped at the starting-post. I only ax for the race to be a fair one. I only ax for my son to start fair with yours. If yours be the better man, then let him win; but don't let him win because he's got too long a start. That's not justice but tyranny. Give every man his chance and make every man work — that's all I ask. If a man's only got the wits to break stones, then see that he breaks 'em; and let them who can do better and earn better money not grudge the stone-breaker a little over and above what his poor wits earn in the market."

"I grant that's good," admitted Baskerville. "Let the strong help the weak. 'Twas Christ found that out, not you Socialists."

"'Tis found out anyway," said Jack Head. "And 'tis true; and therefore it will happen and we can't go back on it. And it follows from that law of strong helping weak that nobody ought to be too rich, any more than they ought to be too poor. Let the State be a millionaire a million times over, if you like — and only the State. So long as the hive be rich, no bee is poor."

Humphrey did not immediately reply. He was following Head's argument to a still larger conclusion.

"And you'd argue that as the strong man can help the weak one, so in time the strong State might help the weak one instead of hindering it, and the powerful of the earth give of their abundance to strengthen the humble and feeble?"

"Why not? Instead of that, the great Powers be bristling with fighting men, and all the sinews of the world be wasted on war. And it shows the uselessness of the Book, anyway, that the Christian nations — so-called — keep the biggest armies and the largest number of men idle, rotting their bodies and souls away in barracks and battleships."

Baskerville nodded.

"There's sense of a lop-sided sort in much that you say, Jack. But 'tisn't the Book that's to blame — 'tis the world that misunderstands the Book and daren't go by the Book — because of the nations around that don't go by it."

"Then why do they pretend they'm Christians? They know if they went by the Book they'd go down; yet they want to drive it into the heads of the next generation. The child hears his father damning the Government because they ban't building enough men-of-war, and next day when the boy comes home with a black eye, his father turns round and tells him to mind his Bible and remember that the peacemakers be blessed."

"I could wish a Government would give Christianity a chance," confessed Mr. Baskerville; "but I suppose 'tis much the same thing as Free Trade — a fine thing if everybody played the game, but a poor thing for one nation if t'others are all for Protection."

"That's a lie," answered Mr. Head. "We've shown Free Trade is a fine thing — single-handed we've shown it, and why? Because Free Trade's a strong sword; but Christianity's rusty and won't stand the strain no

longer. We've passed that stage; and if we was to start Christianity now and offer the cheek to the smiter — well, he'd damn soon smite, and then where are we?"

They chattered on and set the world right according to their outlook, instinct, and understanding. Then the conversation turned into personal channels, and Mr. Baskerville, while admitting the justice of much that Jack asserted, yet blamed him for a certain impatience and bitterness.

"If evolution is going to set all right and the unborn will come into a better world, why get so hot?" he asked.

"Because I'm a thinking, feeling man," answered the other. "Because I hate to see wrong done in the name of right. And you're the same — only you haven't got as much sense as me seemingly. I'm useful — you only want to be useful and don't see how."

"I want to do my part in the world; but just the right way is difficult to choose out among the many roads that offer, Jack. You are positive, and that saves a deal of trouble, no doubt. The positive people go the furthest — for good or evil. But I'm not so certain. I see deeper than you because I've been better educated, though I'm not so clever by nature. Then there's another thing — sympathy. People don't like me, and to be disliked limits a man's usefulness a lot."

"That's stuff," answered Jack; "no more than a maggot got in your head. If they don't like you, there's a reason. They'm feared of your sharp tongue, and think 'tis the key to a hard heart. Then 'tis for you to show 'em what they can't see. I'll tell you what you are: you'm a man sitting hungry in a wheatfield, because you don't know and won't larn how to turn corn into bread. That's you in a word."

Trowlesworthy was reached and Jack went his way.

"You might come and drink a dish of tea some Sunday," said Mr. Baskerville, and the other promised to do so. Then Humphrey proceeded beside the river, and presently ascended a rough slope to his destination. The ruin that alternately drew and repelled him lay below; but for the moment he did not seek it. He climbed to the high ground, dismounted, turned his pony loose, and took his pipe out of his pocket.

The great cone of granite known as Hen Tor lies high upon the eastern bank of Plym, between that streamlet and the bog-foundered table-land of Shavercombe beyond. From its crown the visitor marked Cornwall's coastline far-spreading into the west, and Whitsand Bay reflecting silver morning light along the darker boundaries of earth.

Spaces of grass and fern extended about the tor, and far below a midget that was a man moved along the edge of the ripe bracken and mowed it down with a scythe.

Half a dozen carrion crows took wing and flapped with loud croaking away as Humphrey ascended the tor and sat upon its summit. Again he traversed the familiar scene in his mind, again perceived the difficulties of transit to this place. Occasionally, before these problems, he had set to work obstinately and sought solutions.

Once he had determined to rebuild the ruin in the valley, so that he might turn his back on man and make trial of the anchorite's isolation and hermit's bastard peace; but to-day he was in no mood for such experiments; his misanthropic fit passed upon the west wind, and his thoughts took to themselves a brighter colour.

Where he sat two roof-trees were visible, separated by the distant height of Legis Tor. Trowlesworthy and Ditsworthy alone appeared, and for the rest the

river roamed between them, and flocks and herds wandered upon the hills around. The man still moved below, and long ribbons of fallen fern spread regularly behind him.

A foul smell struck on Baskerville's nostrils, and he saw death not far distant, where the crows had been frightened from their meal. He climbed away from the main pile of the tor and sat in a natural chair hollowed from the side of an immense block of granite that stands hard by. He smoked, and his pony grazed.

A storm of rain fell and passed. The sun succeeded upon it, and for a little while the moor glittered with moisture. Then the wind dried all again. The old man was now entirely out of tune with any thought of a dwelling here. He did not even descend the hill and inspect the ruin beneath. But he had come to spend the day alone, and was contented to do so. His mind busied itself with the last thing that a fellow-man had said to him. He repeated Jack Head's word over and over to himself. Presently he ate the food that he had brought with him, drank at a spring, and walked about to warm his body. The carrion crows cried in air, soared hither and thither, settled again on the rocks at hand and waited, with the perfect patience of unconscious nature, for him to depart. But he remained until the end of the day.

Then occurred a magnificent spectacle. After gold of evening had scattered the Moor and made dark peat and grey rock burn, there rolled up from the south an immense fog, that spread its nacreous sea under the sunset. Born of far-off fierce heat upon the ocean, it advanced and enveloped earth, valley by valley, and ridge by ridge. Only the highest peaks evaded this flood of vapours, and upon them presently

sank the sun. His light descending touched many points and uplifted sprays of mist; whereon, like magic, a thousand galleons rode over the pearl and advanced in a golden flotilla upon this fleeting sea. The rare, brief wonder passed, and the sky above it faded; the sun sank; the fog rolled forward — heavy, cold, a burden for the wet wings of night.

Humphrey set off, and the carrion crows, full hungry, returned to sup.

In Baskerville's mind certain words reverberated still, as they had often done since they were spoken during the morning. They chimed to the natural sounds that had fallen upon his ear throughout the day; they were echoed in the wind and the distant water-murmur; in the cry of birds and call of beasts; in the steady rasping of his pony's teeth through the herbage; and now, in its hoof-beat as it trotted by a sheep-track homeward.

And louder than all these repetitions of it, louder than the natural music that seemed to utter the words in many voices, there came the drumming of his own pulse, laden with the same message, and the answering beat of his heart that affirmed the truth of it.

"A man sitting hungry in a wheat-field, because you don't know and won't learn how to turn corn into bread."

CHAPTER V

MILLY and her husband Rupert came on a Sunday to drink tea at Hawk House. They found Humphrey from home, but he had left a message with Susan Hacker to say that he would return before five o'clock.

"He's got the rheumatics," said Mrs. Hacker. "They have fastened cruel in his shoulder-blades, and he've started on his pony and gone off to see the doctor. Won't have none of my cautcheries, though I know what's good for rheumatics well enough, and I've cured three cases to common knowledge that neither doctor nor that Eliza Gollop could budge, do as they would."

Rupert expressed concern, and went out to meet his uncle, while Milly stopped and helped Susan Hacker to prepare tea.

"And how do 'e like being married?" asked the elder.

"Very well; but not quite so well as I thought to," answered Milly with her usual frankness.

"Ah! same with most, though few have the pluck to confess it."

"Being married is a very fine thing if you've got such a husband as Rupert; but living along with your husband's people ain't so fine, if you understand me. You see, he's farmer now, and he will have his way — a terrible resolute chap where the land and the things be concerned. But sometimes his mother gets a bit restive at Rupert's orders, and sometimes she says, in her quiet way, as her husband never would have held

with this or that. 'Tis a thought awkward now and again, because, you see, Rupert ban't the favourite, and never was."

"You side with him, of course?"

"Always, and always shall do — right or wrong."

"Maybe when Master Ned's married and away Mrs. Baskerville will go easier."

"Don't think I'm grumbling. She's a kind woman, but, like all old married folk, seem to think young married folk be only playing at it. The truth is that I haven't got enough to do for the minute."

Mr. Baskerville returned in half an hour, and Rupert walked beside him. Then, with some silent suffering, the old man alighted, and a boy took the pony to its stable.

"Doctor was out," he said, "so I'll have to trouble you to make up a bit of your ointment after all."

"And so I will," answered Susan. "And if you'd gone to that Gollop woman for the beastliness she pretends will cure everything, I'd never have forgiven you. She helped to kill off your brother, no doubt, but that's no reason why you should give her a chance to kill you."

"You're all alike," he said; "a jealous generation. But if you can have your physic ready in an hour, so much the better; then Rupert shall give my back a good rub before he goes."

Mrs. Hacker was doubtful.

"Better I do it," she said. "'Tis the way it's rubbed in makes the cure."

"He's stronger and can rub harder," answered the patient.

"Uncle Nathan's none too grand, neither," declared his nephew. "Won't say what's amiss, but I do think he's not all he might be. I asked Mrs. Lintern, who knows more about him than anybody, I reckon,

and she told me 'twas nothing much in her opinion — only his throat a bit queer."

"You and Uncle Nathan ought to have wives to look after you," declared Milly as she poured out tea. "You men be unfinished, awkward things alone. You'm always wanting us at every turn, for one reason or another, and after middle age a man looks a fool half his time if he haven't got a woman for his own. Men do the big things and alter the face of the earth and all that, but what becomes of their clever greatness without our clever littleness?"

"Cant! — cant! You all talk that stuff and 'tisn't worth answering. Ask the sailors if they can't sew better than their sweethearts."

Mr. Baskerville was in a hard mood and would allow no credit to the sex. He endured his pain without comment, but it echoed itself in impatient and rather bitter speeches. Rupert fell back on other members of the family, and spoke of his uncle, the master of 'The White Thorn.'

"The good that man does isn't guessed," he said. "The little things — you'd be surprised — yet 'tisn't surprising neither, for every soul you meet speaks well of him; and a man can't win to that without being a wonder. He's made of human kindness, and yet never remembers the kind things he does — no memory for 'em at all."

Humphrey conceded the nobility of this trait, and Milly spoke.

"Not like some we could name, who'll give a gift to-day and fling it in your face to-morrow."

"There are such. My mother's father was such a one," said Mr. Baskerville. "He never forgot a kindness — that he'd done himself. He checked his good angel's record terrible sharp, did that man."

There came an interruption here, and unexpected

visitors in the shape of Nicholas Bassett, the young man who had married Polly Baskerville, and Polly herself. Nicholas was nervous and stood behind his wife; Polly was also nervous, but the sight of her brother Rupert gave her courage.

Her uncle welcomed her with astonishment.

"Wonders never cease," he said. "I didn't count to get a visit from you, Polly, or your husband either. You needn't stand there turning your Sunday hat round and round, Bassett. I shan't eat you, though people here do seem to think I'm a man-eater."

"We came for advice," said Polly, "and I made bold to bring Nicholas. In fact, 'twas his idea that I should speak to you."

Mr. Baskerville was gratified, but his nature forbade him to show it.

"A new thing to come to Uncle Humphrey when you might go to Uncle Nathan," he said.

"'Tis just about Uncle Nathan is the difficulty," declared his niece. Then she turned to her husband. "You speak, Nick. You must know that Nick's rather slow of speech, and can't get his words always, but he's improving. Tell Uncle Humphrey how 'tis, Nick."

Mr. Bassett nodded, dried a damp brow with a red handkerchief, and spoke.

"'Tis like this here," he began. "Under Mr. Vivian Baskerville's will — him being my wife's father — she had five hundred pound."

"We all know that," said Rupert. "And May, too."

"Well, the law of the will was that the money should be handed over when the girls was wedded, or when they comed to the age of five-and-twenty. Therefore, surely it's clear as my wife ought to have her five hundred — eh?"

"Perfectly clear — on the day she married you," said Rupert. "I thought you'd got it, Polly."

"But I haven't. There's legal difficulties — so Uncle Nathan says; and he told Nicholas that there was a doubt in his mind whether — what was it, Nick?"

"The man said that as trustee for everybody he was very unwilling to disturb the money. He said 'twas out at interest and doing very well; and he said he'd pay us five per centum upon it, which comed to twenty-five pounds a year."

"You're entitled to the capital if you want it," declared Mr. Baskerville. "It can't be withheld."

"I've been to the man twice since," said Polly's husband, "and he's always terrible busy, or else just going into it in a few days, or something like that. We've had six months' interest on it; but we want the money — at least, half of it — because we've got ideas about leasing a field where we live to Bickleigh, and buying a cow in calf and a lot of poultry. With all Polly's farm cleverness we can do better with a bit of money than leave it in the bank. At least, that's what we think."

"Ask Rupert here to help," suggested her uncle. "He's on very good terms with Uncle Nat, and he's a man of business now, and Polly's elder brother, and a right to be heard. No doubt, if he says plain and clear that he wants you to have your money without delay, you'll get it."

"I'd leave it till autumn, after Ned's marriage," said Rupert, "then I'd press him to clear things up. Ned will want tons of money then, and I believe Cora Lintern is to have a money present from Uncle Nathan. She got the secret out of her mother, and, of course, told Ned; and now everybody knows. But nobody knows the figure. Therefore, I say Polly had better do nought till the wedding."

"Mr. Nathan's temper isn't what it was," said Rupert's wife. "His health be fretting him a lot, I believe."

"I wish I had our money, anyhow," declared Mr. Bassett; "but if you say wait till autumn, of course we will do so."

Humphrey Baskerville spoke but little. He had fallen into deep private thought upon this news, and now was only aroused by his niece getting up to depart.

"I hope you'll forgive us for troubling you," said Polly; "but we've talked it over a thousand times, and we felt we ought to take the opinion of some wiser person. Still, if you say wait, we'll wait."

"I didn't say wait," answered her uncle, "and I don't take any responsibility for it. Rupert advised you to wait, not me. If a man owed me twopence under a will — let alone five hundred pound — I'd have it, and wouldn't wait a minute."

The young couple departed in a good deal of agitation, and debated this advice very earnestly all the way home; but Rupert stuck to his own opinion, and, when they were gone, chode Humphrey for giving such counsel.

"I'm sure such a thing would hurt Uncle Nathan cruelly," he said. "'Tis as much as to say that you don't trust him — don't trust a man who is trusted by the countryside as none ever was before."

"Easy to be large-minded about other people's money," answered his uncle. "Only if 'twas yours, and not your sister's, I rather think you'd be a bit less patient with the man that held it from you."

Yet another visitor appeared and the family matter was dropped.

Mrs. Hacker brought in Mr. Head.

"Looks as if the whole countryside was coming

here," she declared. "Here's Jack for a cup of tea; and the ointment will be cool enough to use in half an hour."

"Hullo, Bear!" said Rupert. "Who'd have thought of seeing you?"

"I was axed to tea when I felt in a mind to come," replied Mr. Head; "and here I am, if not in the way. And as to being a bear, I'm the sort that needs a lot of stirring up afore I roar — your wife will back me up in that. How's Mr. Baskerville faring?"

"Got the rheumatism," answered Humphrey. "Rupert here be going to rub in some ointment presently."

"I hope 'twill break the heart of it, I'm sure. There's nothing worse. It tells us the truth about our parts better than any sermon. I'm not too gay to-day myself. We was at it hammer and tongs in 'The White Thorn' last night — me and your brother. Such a Tory was never seen in the land afore. I very soon settled Tom Gollop and a few others like him, but Mr. Nathan's got more learning and more power of argument. We drank, too — more than usual, owing to the thirstiness of the night and the flow of speech. Quarts I must have took, and when Ben North looked in to say 'twas closing time, nothing would do but a few of us went in your brother's room, after house was shut, and went at it again."

"Say you were drunk in a word, Jack," suggested Rupert.

"Not drunk, Rupert — still, near it. We all got in sight of it. There's no prophet like the next morning after a wet night. As a man fond of the flesh I say it. And the older you grow, the sharper comes the day after a bust-up. Then Nature gives you a proper talking to, and your heart swells with good resolutions against beer and other things. And then, as soon as you are as right as ninepence — just by

keeping those good resolves — blest if Nature don't tumble down what she's set up, and tempt you with all her might to go on the loose again. You can't steady her, though she can mighty soon steady you. Preaches to you one minute, and then starts off to get you into mischief the next. That's her way — no more sense than any other female."

"Then so much the less reason to put your trust in her," answered Mr. Baskerville. "She's a poor, untaught, savage thing at best. 'Tis madness to trust her, for nothing is weaker than she."

"Nothing is stronger or so strong," declared Jack. "Nature knows what she wants, and she gets what she wants. You can't deny that. She's just, and never does nothing without a reason. Very different to a woman there. She'm digging her claws into your back because you've been doing some foolish thing, I'll warrant."

He drank his tea and aired his opinions. But Mr. Baskerville was in no mood for Jack's philosophy. He retired presently with Rupert, stripped to the waist, and endured a great and forcible application of Mrs. Hacker's ointment. The friction brought comfort with it, and he declared himself better as a result. But he did not again descend from his chamber, and presently the three visitors departed together.

Mr. Head expressed great admiration for Susan Hacker.

"I should like to be better acquaint with that woman," he declared. "For sense in few words there's not her equal about."

"If you want to please her, cuss Eliza Gollop," explained Rupert.

CHAPTER VI

THE setting sun burnt upon Dewerstone's shoulder and beat in a sea of light against the western face of North Wood, until the wind-worn forest edge, taking colour on trunk and bough, glowed heartily.

Already the first summer splendour was dimmed, for these lofty domains suffered full fret of storm and asperity of season. A proleptic instinct, stamped by the centuries, inspired this wood; it anticipated more sheltered neighbours in autumn, though it lagged behind them in spring. Upon its boughs the last vernal splendour fluttered into being, and the first autumnal stain was always visible. Now beech and larch revealed a shadow in their texture of leaf and needle though August had not passed, for their foliage was born into elemental strife. Here homed the west wind, and the salt south storms emptied their vials; here the last snows lingered, and May frost pinched the young green things.

Now roseal and gracious light penetrated the heart of the wood, warmed its recesses, and dwelt upon a grass-grown track that wound through the midst. Toward this path by convergent ways there came a man and woman. As yet half a mile separated them, for they had entered the wood at opposite places; but one desire actuated both, and they moved slowly nearer until they met at a tryst in the deep heart of the trees. Undergrowth rose about them, and their resort was carefully chosen and perfectly concealed. Here oak closely clad the hill, and granite boulders

offered an inner rampart against observation. The man and woman were elderly, yet she was still personable, and he retained a measure of unusual good looks. They came to perform a little rite, sacred and secret, an event celebrated these many years, and unknown to any other human beings but themselves.

Nathan Baskerville put his arms round Priscilla Lintern and drew her beside him and kissed her.

"We shall never find it this year, I'm much afraid," he said. "The time is past. 'Tis always later far than other lilies in the garden, but not so late as this. However, I'll do my best."

"No matter for the flower," she answered, "so long as we keep up our custom."

A slant flame from the sunset stole deliciously through the dusky hiding-places of the wood, and played on the deep mosses and fern-crowns and the tawny motley of the earth, spread like a coverlet beneath. Here dead litter of leaf and twig made the covering of the ground, and through it sprang various seedling things, presently to bear their part in the commonwealth and succeed their forefathers. The ground was amber-bright where the sunshine won to it, and everywhere stretched ivy and bramble, gleamed the lemon light of malempyre, sparkled green sorrel, and rose dim woodbine that wound its arms around the sapling oaks. Wood-rush and wood-sage prospered together, and where water spouted out of the hill there spread green and ruddy mosses, embroidered with foliage of marsh violet and crowned by pallid umbels of angelica. The silver of birches flashed hard by, and the rowan's berries already warmed to scarlet.

Hither after their meeting came the man and woman, and then Nathan, searching sharply, uttered a cry of triumph, and pointed where, at their feet, grew certain dark green twayblade leaves that sprouted from the

grass. Here dwelt lilies-of-the-valley — their only wild haunt in Devon — and the man now made haste to find a blossom and present it to his mistress. But he failed to do so. Only a dead spike or two appeared, and presently he gave up the search with some disappointment.

"They must have bloomed just when I was ill and couldn't come," he said.

"'Tis no matter at all," she answered. "The thought and the meeting here are the good thing. We'll go back into the wood now, further from the path. To me 'tis marvellous, Nat, to think the crafty world has never guessed."

"It is," he admitted. "And sometimes in my dark moments — however, we can leave that to-day. We're near at the end of our labours, so far as the children are concerned. Cora was always the most difficult. But the future's bright, save for the cash side. I hope to God 'twill come right afore the wedding; but ——"

"Go on," she said. "We can't pretend to be so happy as usual this year. Let's face it. I know you're worried to death. But money's nought alongside your health. You're better again; you've shown me that clear enough. And nothing else matters to us."

"Yes, I'm all right, I hope. But I'm a bit under the weather. Things have gone curiously crooked ever since Vivian died. I was a fool. I won't disguise that; but somehow my luck seemed so good that a few little troubles never looked worth considering. Then, just before he went, I got into a regular thunderstorm. It blew up against the steady wind of my good fortune, as thunderstorms will. Vivian did me a good turn by dying just when he did — I can't deny it; and everything is all right now — for all practical purposes. The silver mine will be a wonder of

the world by all accounts. Still, I've had a good deal to trouble me, and things look worse when a man's sick."

"Shall you be giving Polly Bassett her money soon? Heathman tells me her husband's grumbling a bit."

"All in good time. When our Cora is married I shall try and fork out a good slice of Vivian's estate. Ned must have the capital he wants, and I've got to find a hundred for Cora's wedding gift."

"Why do that yet?"

"I'll do it if I have to sell myself up," he said fiercely. "Isn't she my first favourite of our three? Don't I worship the ground she goes on, and love her better than anything in the world after you yourself?"

She sighed.

"How it weighs heavier and heavier after all these years! And I always thought 'twould weigh lighter and lighter. We were fools to have childer. But for them we could have let the world know and been married, and gived back the five thousand to your wife's people. But not now — never now, for the children's sake, I suppose."

"They'll know in good time, and none else. When I come to my end, I'm going to tell 'em I'm their father, according to your wish, and because I've promised you on my oath to do it; but none else must ever know it; and it would be a wiser thing, Priscilla, if you could only see it so, that they didn't either."

"They must know, and they shall."

"Well, it may be sooner than anybody thinks. The position is clear enough: I might have married and still kept the five thousand, because the lawyers said that my dead wife's wish wouldn't hold water in law; but I didn't know that till 'twas too late, and your first child had come. Then we talked it out, and you was content and so was I. Now there are three of

them, and though I'd face the music so brave as you and go to my grave spurned by all men, if necessary, what would better it for them? Nothing short of an Act of Parliament would make 'em legitimate now. I kept the condition of my dead wife, because you urged me to do it and weren't feared of the consequences; but now, though I can make you my lawful wife, I can't make them my lawful children, and therefore surely 'tis better they shall never know they are my children at all?"

"'Twas a promise," she said, "and I hold you to it. I'm fixed on it that they shall know."

"Very well, so it shall be, then. Only for God's sake look to it for everybody's sake that it don't get out after, and ruin you all. I shouldn't sleep in my grave if I thought the life-long secret was common knowledge."

"You can trust them to keep it, I should think."

"The girls, yes; but Heathman's so easy and careless."

"Suppose you was to marry me even now, Nat, would that help?"

"I'll do it, as I've always said I'll do it. But that means I should be in honour bound to pay five thousand to my first wife's people. Well, I can't—I can't at this moment—not a penny of it. Just now I'm a good deal driven. In a year or two I might, no doubt; but there's that tells me a year or two——"

He put up his hand to his throat.

"You swore to me on your oath that you were better, last time you came down by night."

"I was; but—it's here, Priscilla—deep down and —— Maybe 'twill lift again, and maybe it won't. But we must be ready. I'd give my eternal soul if things were a little straighter; but time—plenty of time—is wanted for that, and 'tis just time I can't count upon.

I'm not so young as I was, and I've not the head for figures I used to have."

"If you don't marry, you've got absolute power to dispose of that five thousand. 'Tis yours, in fact. Yet at best that's a paltry quibble, as you've admitted sometimes."

"Leave it," he said. "Don't let this day be nought but cloud. We're married afore God, but not afore man, because to do that would have lost me five thousand pounds. When I die, I've the right to make over that money to you — at least, what's left of it."

"That's a certainty for me and Heathman and Phyllis?"

"Leave it — leave it," he cried irritably. "You know that what a man can do I shall do. You're more to me than any living thing — much, much more. You're my life, and you've been my life for thirty years — and you will be to the end of my life. I know where I stand and how I stand."

"Don't think I'd care to live a day longer than you do, Nat. Don't think I'm careful for myself after you be gone. 'Tis only for your boy and girl as I care to know anything."

He took her hand.

"I know you well enough — you priceless woman!" he answered. "Let's go a bit further through the forest. Come what may, all's got to be bright and cheerful at Cora's wedding; and after, when they've got their money, I'll have a good go into things with Mr. Popham, my lawyer at Cornwood. He's heard nothing yet, but he shall hear everything. Have no fear of the upshot. I know where I've always trusted, and never in vain."

Like two children they walked hand in hand together. For a long time neither spoke, then she addressed him.

"You've taught me to be brave and put a bright face on life afore the world, and now I'll not be wanting."

"Well I know that. 'Brave!' 'Tis too mild a a word for you. You've come through your life in a way that would maze the people with wonder if they only knew it. So secret, so patient, so clever. Never was heard or known the like. A wonderful wife — a wife in ten thousand."

The sun began to sink where Cornwall, like a purple cloud, rose far off against the sky; yet still the undulations of the land, mingling with glory, melted into each other under the sunset, and still North Wood shone above the shadows. But a deep darkness began to stretch upwards into it, where the Dewerstone's immense shade was projected across the valley. At length only the corner of the forest flashed a final fire; then that, too, vanished, and the benighted trees sighed and shivered and massed themselves into amorphous dimness under the twilight.

The man and woman stopped together a while longer, and after that their converse ended. They caressed and prepared to go back by different ways into the world.

"Come good or evil, fair weather or foul, may we have a few happy returns yet of this day; and may I live to find you the lily-of-the-valley again once or twice before the end," he said.

For answer she kissed him again, but could not trust herself to speak.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE is a compromise and a concession. According to the measure of our diplomacy, so much shall we win from our fellows; according to our physical endowment, so much will Nature grant. All men are envoys to the court of the world, and it depends upon the power behind them whether they are heard and heeded, or slighted and ignored. To change the figure, each among us sets up his little shop in the social mart and tries to tempt the buyer; but few are they who expose even necessary wares, and fewer still the contemporary purchasers who know a treasure when they see it.

An accident now lifted the curtain from Humphrey Baskerville's nature, threw him for a day into the companionship of his kind, and revealed to passing eyes a gleam of the things hidden within him. No conscious effort on his part contributed to this illumination, for he was incapable of making such. His curse lay in this: that he desired to sell, yet lacked wit to win the ear of humanity, or waken interest in any buyer's bosom. Yet now the goods he offered with such ill grace challenged attention. Accident focussed him in a crowd; and first the people were constrained to admit his presence of mind at a crisis, and then they could not choose but grant the man a heart.

It happened that on the day before Princetown pony fair Mr. Baskerville's groom fell ill and had to keep his bed; but twenty ponies were already at Princetown. Only Humphrey and his man knew their exact value, and the market promised to be unusually good. His stock represented several hundred pounds, for

Mr. Baskerville bred a special strain possessing the Dartmoor stamina with added qualities of speed and style. The irony of chance ordained that one who despised all sport should produce some of the best polo ponies in the West of England.

Mr. Baskerville saw nothing for it but to sell by deputy at loss, or withdraw his stock from the fair. He debated the point with Mrs. Hacker, and her common-sense revealed an alternative.

"Lord, man alive, what are you frightened of?" she asked. "Can't you go up along, like any other chap with summat to sell, and get rid of your beasts yourself? You did use to do it thirty year ago, and nobody was any the worse, I believe."

He stared at her.

"Go in a crowd like that and barter my things like a huckster?"

"Well, why not? You'm only made of flesh and bone like t'others. You won't melt away. 'Tis just because you always avoid 'em, that they think you give yourself airs, and reckon they ban't good enough company for you."

"I don't avoid 'em."

"Yes, you do. But you'm not the only honest man in the world, though sometimes you think you are. And if you'd ope your eyes wider, you'd find a plenty others. For my part, if I was paid for it, I couldn't number more rogues in Shaugh than I can count upon the fingers of both hands."

"To go up myself! Who'd believe it was me if they saw me?"

"They want your ponies, not you; and when it came to paying the price of the ponies, they'd soon know 'twas you then."

"I suppose you think I charge too much. Like your impudence! Are you going?" he asked.

"Why, of course I'm going. 'Tis my only 'out' for the year."

"They'll fancy 'tis the end of the world up at 'Duchy Inn' if I come along and take my place at the ordinary."

"No, they won't: they'll be a deal too busy to trouble about you. You go, master, and you'll stand a lot better in your own eyes for going. 'Twill be a great adventure in your life. You'm a deal too much up on the hill there, along with the foxes and other wild things; and you know it."

"I haven't the cut for a revel. 'Tis nonsense to think of my going up."

"To think of it can't do no harm, anyway," she said. "You think and think, and you'll find 'tis your duty as a sensible creature to go."

"Not my duty. 'Twill hurt none if I stay away."

"'Twill hurt your pocket. You know right well 'tis the proper thing that you go. And if you do, I'll ax for a fairing. And if you get me one, I'll get you one."

"You can put off old age like a garment and be a girl again," he said.

"So I can, then. 'Tis your brother sets that wise fashion, not you. He's as lively as a kitten when there's a frolic in the air. And so be I — though all sixty-five. You should have seen me at giglet market in my youth!"

He did not answer; but the next morning he appeared shamefaced and clad for the fair.

"Well done, you!" cried Mrs. Hacker. "Be you going to drive the black gig? I was riding up in the pony-cart along with Mr. Waite's housekeeper from Coldstone, but ——"

"You can come with me, if you please. All foolery, and 'tis offering to rain — however, I'm going through

with the job now. And mind you don't take too much liquor up there. I know your ways when you get with a lot of silly people."

They started presently, and Humphrey made sour remarks at the expense of Susan's bonnet. Then by steep ascent and descent they went their way and fell in with other folk also bound for the festivity. Some they passed and some passed them. Cora Lintern and Ned Baskerville drove together in a flashy, high-wheeled dog-cart; and the sight of Cora brought a cloud upon Mr. Baskerville. She was soon gone, however. The lofty vehicle slipped by with a glitter of wheels, a puff of dust, a shout from Ned as he lifted his whip hand, and a flutter of pale pink and blue where Cora sat in her finery.

"Heartless minx!" growled the old man. "A parrot and a popinjay. No loss to the world if that pair was to break their necks together."

"Don't you tell such speeches as that, there's a good man," answered Mrs. Hacker. "The mischief with your sort is that you be always crying out nasty things you don't think; which is just the opposite of us sensible people, as only think the nasty things, but take very good care for our credit's sake not to say 'em. None like you for barking; and them as hear you bark take it for granted you bite as well. And when I tell 'em you don't bite, they won't believe it."

"Take care I never bite you for so much plain speaking," he said; "and I'll thank you to lay hold on the reins while we walk up this hill; for I want to read a letter. 'Tis about the ponies from a would-be buyer."

He read and Mrs. Hacker drove. They traversed the miles of moorland at a slow pace, and not a few who passed them displayed surprise at the spectacle of Mr. Baskerville on his way to the fair.

At Devil's Bridge, beneath the last long hill into Princetown, a vehicle from Shaugh overtook them and the Linterns appeared. Heathman was driving, and beside him sat his mother; while at the back of the cart were Nathan Baskerville and Phyllis Lintern.

"Hullo! Wonders never cease!" cried the publican. "Good luck and long life to you, Humphrey! Now I couldn't have seen a better sight than this. Hold on! I want to have a talk afore the fair."

"If you want to talk, I'll onlight and you do the same," said Nathan's brother. "The women can drive on, and we'll walk into Princetown."

Priscilla Lintern and Mrs. Hacker kept their places and drove slowly up the hill side by side; but not before Nat had chaffed Susan and applauded her holiday bonnet. Heathman and his sister walked on together; the brothers remained behind.

The younger was in uproarious mood. He laughed and jested and congratulated Humphrey on his courage in thus coming among the people.

None would have recognised in this jovial spirit that man who walked not long before with a woman in North Wood, and moved heavily under the burdens of sickness and of care. But to Nathan belonged the art of dropping life's load occasionally and proceeding awhile in freedom. He felt physically a little better, and intended to enjoy himself to-day to the best of his power. Resolutely he banished the dark clouds from his horizon and let laughter and pleasure possess him.

"How's your throat?" asked Humphrey. "You don't look amiss, but they tell me you're not well."

"I hope it may mend. 'Tis up and down with me. I can't talk so loud as once I could, and I can't eat easy; but what's the odds as long as I can drink? I'm all right, and shall be perfectly well again soon,

no doubt. And you — what in the name of wonder brings you to a revel?"

"My ponies. There's twenty and all extra good. Chapman goes and falls ill after the ponies was brought up here. The fool would bring 'em though there's no need. Buyers are very well content to come to my paddocks. But custom is a tyrant to the old, and if I didn't send to the sales, Chapman would think something had gone wrong with the world."

"I'm right glad you're here, and I hope 'tis the beginning of more gadding about for you. 'Tis men like you and me that lend weight to these meetings. We ought to go. 'Tis our duty."

"You're better pleased with yourself than I am, as usual."

"We ought to be pleased," answered the other complacently. "We are the salt of the earth — the rock that society is built on."

"Glad you're so well satisfied."

"Not with myself specially; but I'm very well pleased with my class, and the older I grow the better I think of it."

"People be like yonder pool — scum at the top and dirt at the bottom," declared Humphrey. "The sweet water is in the middle; and the useful part of the people be the middle part."

"In a way, yes. We of the lower middle-class are the backbone: the nation has to depend on us; but I'm not for saying the swells haven't their uses. Only they'd be nought without us."

"It takes all sorts to make a world. But leave that. I ban't up here to talk politics. What does doctor say about your throat?"

"Leave that too. I'm not here to talk about my health. I want to forget it for a few hours. The wedding is on my mind just now. Mrs. Lintern and

her daughter intend it to be a bit out of the common; and so do I. But the bride's mother's set on it taking place at our chapel, and Hester wants it to be at church. Ned don't care a rush, of course."

"It ought to be at church."

"Don't see any pressing reason. Toss up, I say."

"You should know better than to talk like that. You Dissenters ——"

"No arguments, Humphrey. But all the same they must be married in church or chapel, and since there's such a division of opinion — I'm anxious to see Ned married. 'Tis more than time and certainly no fault of his that they didn't join sooner. But Cora had her own ideas and ——"

"Oblige me by not naming either of them. You can't expect me to be interested. Even if they were different from what they are, I should remember the cruel past too keenly to feel anything good towards either of them."

"Let the past go. You're too wise a man to harbour unkind thoughts against headstrong youth. Let 'em be happy while they can. They'll have their troubles presently, like the rest of us."

"They'll have what they're brewing, no doubt. Empty, heartless wretches — I will say it, feel as you may for Cora."

"I hope you'll live to see her better part. She's a sensible woman and a loving one, for all you think not. At any rate, you'll come and see them married, Humphrey?"

"You can ask me such a thing?"

"Let bygones be bygones."

"What was it you wanted to speak to me about?"

"Just that — the wedding. I must make it a personal matter. I attach a good deal of importance to it. I'm very interested in the Linterns — wrapped up

in them wouldn't be too strong a word for it. I'll confess to you that the mother is a good deal to me — my best friend in this world. I owe a lot of my happiness to her. She's made my life less lonely and often said the word in season. You know what a wise woman can be: you was married yourself."

Humphrey did not answer and his brother spoke again.

"There's only us two left now — you and me. You might pleasure me in this matter and come. Somehow it's grown to be a feeling with me that your absence will mar all."

"Stuff! I've been the death's-head at too many feasts in our family. In a word, I won't do it. I won't be there. I don't approve of either of 'em, and I've not interest enough in 'em now to take me across the road to see them."

"If you'll come, the marriage shall be in church. Priscilla will agree if I press it. I can't offer more than that."

"I won't come, so leave it."

Nathan's high spirits sank for a little while; then Princetown was reached and he left his brother and strove to put this pain from him for the present, as he had banished all other sources of tribulation. He was soon shaking hands with his acquaintance and making merry among many friends. But Humphrey proceeded to the place where his ponies were stalled, and immediately began to transact business with those who were waiting for him.

CHAPTER VIII

GIPSY blood runs thin in England to-day, but a trickle shall be found to survive among the people of the booth and caravan; and glimpses of a veritable Romany spirit may yet be enjoyed at lesser fairs and revels throughout the country. By their levity and insolence; by their quick heels and dark faces; by the artist in them; by their love of beauty and of music; by their skill to charm money from the pockets of the slow-thinking folk; and by their nimble wits you shall know them.

A few mongrels of the race annually find Princetown, and upon days of revel may there be seen at shooting-galleries, 'high-fliers,' and 'roundabouts.'

Here they are chaffing the spectators and cajoling pennies from young and old; here, astounding the people by their lack of self-consciousness; here, singing or dancing; here, chafering; here, driving hard bargains for the local ponies; here, changing their doubtful coins for good ones, or raising strife between market-merry folk and prospering from the quarrels of honest men, after the manner of their kind.

Two streams of holiday-makers drifted through each other and through the little fair. They passed up and down the solitary street, loitered and chattered, greeted friends, listened to the din of the music, to the altercations of the customers and salesmen, to the ceaseless laughter of children and whinny of the ponies.

On either side of that open space spread in the village midst, an array of carts had been drawn up, and

against these barricades were tethered various animals which the vehicles had brought. They stood or reposed on litter of fern and straw cast down for them.

Here were pigs, flesh-coloured and black, and great raddled rams in a panting row. Amid the brutes tramped farmers and their men.

The air was full of the smell of live mutton and swine; and among them — drifting, stopping in thoughtful knots, arguing, and laughing heavily, the slow-eyed yokels came and went. The rams bleated and dribbled and showed in a dozen ways their hatred of this publicity; the pigs cared not, but exhibited a stoic patience.

Upon the greensward beside the road stood separate clusters of guarded ponies. Old and young they were, gainly and ungainly, white, black, and brown, with their long manes and tails often bleached to a rusty pallor by the wind and sun.

In agitated groups the little creatures stood. Company cried to company with equine language, and the air was full of their squealings, uttered in long-drawn protests or sudden angry explosions.

Occasionally a new drove from afar would arrive and trot to its place in double and treble ranks — a passing billow of black and bright russet or dull brown, with foam of tossing manes, flash of frightened eyes, and soft thud and thunder of many unshod hoofs.

The people now came close, now scattered before a pair of uplifted heels where a pony, out of fear, showed temper. The exhibits were very unequal. Here a prosperous man marshalled a dozen colts; here his humbler neighbour could bring but three or four to market. Sometimes the group consisted of no more than a mare and foal at foot.

Round about were children, who from far off had ridden some solitary pony to the fair, and hoped that

they might get the appointed price and carry money home to their parents or kinsfolk.

Hanging close on every side to the main business and thrusting in where space offered for a stall, rows of small booths sprang up; while beyond them on waste land stood the merry-go-rounds, spinning to bray of steam-driven organs, the boxing-tent, the beast show and the arena, where cocoanuts were lifted on posts against a cloth.

Here worked the wanderers and played their parts with shout and song; but at the heart of the fair more serious merchants stood above their varied wares, and with unequal skill and subtlety won purchasers. These men displayed divergent methods, all based on practical experience of human nature.

A self-assertive and defiant spirit sold braces and leather thongs and buckles. His art was to pretend the utmost indifference to his audience; he seemed not to care whether they purchased his goods or no, yet let it be clearly understood that none but a fool would miss the opportunities he offered.

A cheap-jack over against the leather-seller relied upon humour and sleight of hand. He sold watches that he asserted to be gold; but he was also prepared to furnish clocks of baser metal for more modest purses. He dwelt upon the quality of the goods, and defied his audience to find within the width and breadth of the United Kingdom such machinery at such a price. He explained also very fully that he proposed to return among them next year, with a special purpose to make good any defective timepieces that might by evil chance lurk unsuspected amid his stock. He reminded them he had been among them during the previous year also, as a guarantee of his good faith.

Beyond him a big, brown half-caste sold herb pills and relied upon a pulpit manner for his success. He

came with a message of physical salvation from the God of the Christians.

He mingled dietetics and dogma; he prayed openly; he showed emotion; he spoke of Nature and the Power above Nature; he called his Maker to witness that nothing but the herbs of the field had gone to make his medicine.

He had good store of long words with which to comfort rustic ears. He spoke of 'a palliative,' 'a febrifuge,' and 'a panacea.' He wanted but threepence for each box, and asserted that the blessing of the Lord accompanied his physic.

"Why am I here?" he asked. "Who sent me? I tell you, men and women, that God sent me. We must not carry our light under a bushel. We must not hide a secret that will turn a million unhappy men and women into a million happy men and women. God gave me this secret, and though I would much sooner be sitting at home in my luxurious surroundings, which have come to me as the result of selling this blessed corrective of all ills of the digestion and alimentary canals, yet — no — this world is no place for idleness and laziness. So I am here with my pills, and I shall do my Master's work so long as I have hands to make the medicine and a voice to proclaim it. And in Christ's own blessed words I can say that where two or three just persons are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them, my friends — there am I in the midst of them!"

Amid the welter of earth-colour, dun and grey there flashed yellow or scarlet, where certain Italian women moved in the crowd. They sold trinkets, or offered to tell fortunes with the aid of little green parakeets in cages.

The blare and grunt of coarse melody persisted; and the people at the booths babbled ceaselessly where they sold their sweetmeats, cakes, and fruit. Some

were anchored under little awnings; some moved their goods about on wheels with flags fluttering to attract attention.

Old and young perambulated the maze. Every manner of man was gathered here. Aged and middle-aged, youthful and young, grey and white, black and brown, bearded and shorn, all came and went together. Some passed suspicious and moody; some stood garrulous, genial, sanguine, according to their fortunes or fancied fortunes in the matter of sale and barter.

And later in the day, by the various roads that stretch north, south, and west from Princetown, droves of ponies began to wend, some with cheerful new masters; many with gloomy owners, who had nothing to show but their trouble for their pains.

This spacious scene was hemmed in by a rim of sad-coloured waste and ragged hills, while overhead the grey-ribbed sky hung low and shredded mist.

Humphrey Baskerville had sold his ponies in an hour, and was preparing to make a swift departure when accident threw him into the heart of a disturbance and opened the way to significant incidents.

The old man met Jack Head and was speaking with him, but suddenly Jack caught the other by his shoulders and pulled him aside just in time to escape being knocked over. A dozen over-driven bullocks hurtled past them with sweating flanks and dripping mouths. Behind came two drovers, and a brace of barking dogs hung upon the flanks of the weary and frightened cattle.

Suddenly, as the people parted, a big brute, dazed and maddened by the yelping dogs now at his throat, now at his heels, turned and dashed into the open gate of a cottage by the way.

The door of the dwelling stood open and before man or sheepdog had time to turn him, the reeking bullock

had rushed into the house. There was a crash within, the agonised yell of a child and the scream of a woman.

Then rose terrified bellowings from the bullock, where it stood jammed in a passageway with two frantic dogs at its rear.

A crowd collected, and Mr. Baskerville amazed himself by rushing forward and shouting a direction. "Get round, somebody, and ope the back door!"

A woman appeared at the cottage window with a screaming and bloody child in her arms.

"There's no way out; there's no way out," she cried. "There's no door to the garden!"

"Get round; get round! Climb over the back wall," repeated Baskerville. Then he turned to the woman. "Ope the window and come here, you silly fool!" he said.

She obeyed, and Humphrey found the injured child was not much hurt, save for a wound on its arm. Men soon opened the rear door of the cottage and drove the bullock out of the house; then they turned him round in the garden and drove him back again through the house into the street.

The hysterical woman regarded Mr. Baskerville as her saviour and refused to leave his side. The first drover offered her a shilling for the damage and the second stopped to wrangle with Jack Head, who blamed him forcibly.

"'Twas the dogs' fault — anybody could see that," he declared. "We're not to blame."

"The dogs can't pay, you silly fool," answered Head. "If you let loose a dog that don't know his business, you've got to look out for the trouble he makes. 'Tis the devil's own luck for you as that yowling child wasn't killed. And now you want to get out of it for nought! There's a pound's worth of cloam smashed in there."

The woman, who was alone, sent messengers for her husband, but they failed to find him; then she declared that Mr. Baskerville should assess the amount of her claim and the people upheld her. Thus most reluctantly he was thrust into a sort of prominence.

"You was the only one with sense to tell 'em what to do; and so you'd better finish your good job and fix the price of the breakages," said Jack.

The man with the bullocks, when satisfied that Humphrey would be impartial and indifferent to either party, agreed to this proposal, and Mr. Baskerville, quite bewildered by such a sudden notoriety, entered the cottage, calculated the damage done, and soon returned.

"You've got to pay ten shillings," he said. "Your bullock upset a tray and smashed a terrible lot of glass and china. He also broke down four rails of the balusters and broke a lamp that hung over his head. The doctor will charge a shilling for seeing to the child's arm also. So that's the lowest figure in fairness. Less it can't be."

The drover cursed and swore at this. He was a poor man and would be ruined. His master would not pay, and if the incident reached headquarters his work must certainly be taken from him. None offered to help and Humphrey was firm.

"Either pay and thank God you're out of it so easily," he said, "or tell us where you come from."

The drovers talked together, and then they strove to bate the charges brought against them. Their victim, now grown calmer, agreed to take seven shillings, but Mr. Baskerville would not hear of this. He insisted upon observance of his ruling, and the man with the bullocks at length brought out a leather purse and counted from it seven shillings. To these his companion added three.

Then the leader flung the money on the ground, and

to accompaniment of laughter and hisses hastened after his stock. The cattle were not for Princetown, and soon both men and their cavalcade plodded onward again into the peace and silence of a mist-clad moor.

They cursed themselves weary, kicked the offending dog and, with a brute instinct to revenge their mishap, smote and bruised the head of the bullock responsible for this misfortune when it stopped to drink at a pool beside the road.

Humphrey Baskerville won a full measure of applause on this occasion. He took himself off as swiftly as possible afterwards; but words were spoken of approval and appreciation, and he could not help hearing them. His heart grew hot within him. A man shouted after him, "Good for the old Hawk!"

Before he had driven off, Nathan Baskerville met him at 'The Duchy Hotel' and strove to make him drink.

"A drop you must have along with me," he said. "Why, there's a dozen fellows in the street told me how you handled those drovers. You ought to have the Commission of the Peace, that's what you ought to have. You're cut out for it."

"A lot of lunatics," answered the elder. "No presence of mind in fifty of 'em. Nought was done by me. The job might have cost a life, but it didn't, so enough's said. I won't drink. I must get back home."

"Did the ponies go off well?"

"Very. If you see Susan Hacker, tell her I've gone. The old fool's on one of they roundabouts, I expect. And if she breaks it down, she needn't come back to me for the damages."

"A joke! A joke from you! This is a day of wonders, to be sure!" cried Nathan. "Now crown all and come along o' me, and we'll find the rest of the family and the Linterns, and all have a merry-go-round together!"

But his brother was gone, and Nathan turned and rejoined a party of ram-buyers in the street.

Elsewhere Mrs. Lintern and Mrs. Baskerville walked together. Their hearts were not in the fair, but they spoke of the pending marriage and hoped that a happy union was in store for Ned and Cora.

The young couple themselves tasted such humble delights as the fair could offer, but Cora's pleasure was represented by the side glances of other girls, and she regarded the gathering as a mere theatre for her own display. Ned left her now and again and then returned. Each time he came back he lifted his hat to her and exhibited some new sign of possession.

Cora affected great airs and a supercilious play of eyebrow that impressed the other young women. She condescended to walk round the fair and regarded this perambulation as a triumph, until the man who sold watches marked her among his listeners, observed her vanity, and raised a laugh at her expense. Then she lost her temper and declared her wish to depart. She was actually going when there came up Milly and her husband, Rupert Baskerville.

Ned whispered to his sister-in-law to save the situation if possible, and Milly with some tact and some good fortune managed to do so.

Cora smoothed her ruffled feathers and joined the rest of the family at the inn. There all partook of the special ordinary furnished on this great occasion to the countryside.

In another quarter Thomas Gollop, Joe Voysey and their friends took pleasure after their fashion. Every man won some sort of satisfaction from the fair and held his day as well spent.

Perhaps few could have explained what drew them thither or kept them for many hours wandering up and down, now drinking, now watching the events of the

fair, now eating, now drinking again. But so the day passed with most among them, and not until evening darkened did the mist thicken into rain and seriously damp the proceedings.

Humphrey Baskerville, well pleased with his sales and even better pleased with the trivial incident of the bullock, went his way homeward and was glad to be gone. His state of mind was such that he gave alms to two mournful men limping slowly on crutches into Princetown. Each of these wounded creatures had lost a leg, and one lacked an arm also. They dragged along a little barrel-organ that played hymns, and their faces were thin, anxious, hunger-bitten.

These men stopped Mr. Baskerville, but not to beg. They desired to know the distance yet left to traverse before they reached the fair.

"We set out afore light from Dousland, but we didn't know what a terrible road 'twas," said one. "You see, with but a pair o' legs between us, we can't travel very fast."

Humphrey considered, and his heart being uplifted above its customary level of caution, he acted with most unusual impulse and served these maimed musicians in a manner that astounded them. His only terror was that somebody might mark the deed; but this did not happen, and he accomplished his charity unseen.

"It's up this hill," he said; "but the hill's a steep one, and the fair will be half over afore you get there at this gait."

The men shrugged their shoulders and prepared to stump on.

"Get in," said Mr. Baskerville. "Get in, the pair of you, and I'll run you to the top."

He alighted and helped them to lift their organ up behind, while they thanked him to the best of their power. They talked and he listened as he drove them;

and outside the village, on level ground, he dropped them again and gave them half-a-crown. Much heartened and too astonished to display great gratitude, they crawled upon their way while Humphrey turned again.

The taste of the giving was good to the old man, and its flavour astonished him. He overtook the drovers and their cattle presently, and it struck him that this company it was who had made the day so remarkable for him.

He half determined with himself to stop and speak with them and even restore the money he had exacted; for well he knew the gravity of their loss.

But, unfortunately for themselves, the twain little guessed what was in his mind; they still smarted from their disaster, and when they saw the cause of it they swore at him, shook their fists and threatened to do him evil if opportunity offered.

Whereupon Mr. Baskerville hardened his heart, kept his money in his pocket and drove forward.

CHAPTER IX

THE sensitive Cora could endure no shadow of ridicule. To laugh at her was to anger her, for she took herself too seriously, the common error of those who do not take their fellow-creatures seriously enough. When, therefore, she committed a stupid error and Ned chaffed her about it, there sprang up a quarrel between them, and Cora, in her wounded dignity, even went so far as to talk of postponing marriage.

Nathan Baskerville explained the complication to a full bar; and when he had done so the tide of opinion set somewhat against Ned's future bride.

"You must know that Phyllis Lintern has gone away from home, and last thing she did before she went was to ask Cora to look after a nice little lot of young ducks that belonged to her and were coming forward very hopeful. Of course, Cora said she would, and one day, mentioning it to my nephew Rupert's wife, Milly told her that the heads of nettles, well chopped up, were splendid food for young ducks. Wishful to please Phyllis and bring on the birds, what does Cora do but busy herself for 'em? She gets the nettle-tops and chops 'em up and gives 'em to the ducklings; and of course the poor wretches all sting their throats and suffocate themselves. For why? Because she let 'em have the food raw! We all know she ought to have boiled the nettles. And a good few have laughed at her about it and made her a bit savage."

"That's no reason, surely, why she should quarrel

with her sweetheart. 'Twasn't his fault," declared Jack Head, who was in the bar.

"None in the world; but Ned joked her and made her rather snappy. In fact, he went on a bit too long. You can easily overdo a thing like that. And none of us like a joke at our expense to be pushed too far."

"It shows what a clever woman she is, all the same," declared Mr. Voysey; "for when Ned poked fun at her first, which he did coming out of church on Sunday, I was by and heard her. What d'you think she said? 'You don't boil thistles for a donkey,' says she, 'so how was anybody to know you boil nettles for a duck?' Pretty peart that — eh?"

"So it was," declared Nathan. "Very sharp, and a good argument for that matter. I've bought Phyllis a dozen new birds and nothing more need come of it; but Ned's a bit of a fool here and there, and he hadn't the sense to let well alone; and now she's turned on him."

"He'll fetch her round, a chap so clever with the girls as him," said Voysey; whereupon Timothy Waite, who was of the company, laughed scornfully.

"How can that man be clever at anything?" he asked. "Here's his own uncle. Be Ned clever at anything on God's earth but spending money, Mr. Baskerville? Come now! An honest answer."

"Yes," replied Nathan promptly. "He was never known to fall off a horse."

The laugh rose against Timothy, for the farmer's various abilities did not extend to horsemanship. He had been thrown a week before and still went a little lame.

"Ned's all right," added Jack Head. "Lazy, no doubt — like everybody else who can be. But he's generous and good-hearted, and no man's enemy. The

girl's a fool to keep him dangling. A little more of it and he'll — however, I'll not meddle in other people's business."

Mr. Gollop entered at this moment and saw his foe.

"Do I hear John Head saying that he don't meddle with other people's business?" asked the sexton. "Gin cold, please. Well, well; since when have Head made that fine rule?"

"Drink your gin," said Jack, "and then have another. You ban't worth talking to till you've got a drop of liquor in you. When you're tuned up I'll answer you. How's Masterman getting on? He must be a patient man, or else a terrible weak one, to have you still messing about the church."

"Better you leave the church alone," retorted Thomas. "You'd pull down every church in the land if you could; and if it wasn't for men like me, as withstand your sort and defy you, there'd very soon be no law and order in the State."

"'Tis your blessed church where there's no law and order," answered Jack. "The State's all right so long as the Liberals be in; but a house divided against itself falleth. You won't deny that. And that's the hobble you Christians have come to. And so much the easier work for my side — to sweep the whole quarrelsome, narrow-minded boiling of you to the devil."

"Stop there, Jack!" cried Mr. Baskerville. "No religion in this bar and no politics. You know the rules."

"Let him go on," said Gollop gloomily. "There's a bitter truth in what he says. We're not shoulder to shoulder and none can pretend we are. Take Masterman — that man! What did he say only this morning in vestry? 'Gollop,' he said, 'the roots are being starved. If we don't get rain pretty quick there'll be no turnips — no, nor mangolds neither.'"

Half a dozen raised their voices in support of this assertion.

"That's truth anyway," declared Timothy. "Never knew such a beastly drought at this season. Even rain will not bring the crop up to average weight now. It's beyond nature to do it."

"Well, he's going to pray for rain," said Gollop. "Next Sunday we shall ax for 'moderate rain and showers.'"

"Well, why not?" asked Nathan. "That's what the man's there for surely."

"Why not? Because the glass is up 'pon top of everything, and the wind's in the east steady as a rock. That's why not. You don't want prayer to be turned into a laughing-stock. We don't want our ministers to fly in the face of Providence, do we? To pray for rain at present be equally mad as to pray for snow. 'Tis just courting failure. Then this here man, Jack Head, and other poisonous members, will laugh, like Elijah when he drawed on them false prophets, and say our Jehovah be asleep."

"Not me," answered Head. "'Tis your faith be asleep. You've given your side away properly now, my bold hero! So you've got such a poor opinion of your Jehovah that you reckon to ax Him to take the wind out of the east be going too far? But you're right. Your God can't do it. All the same, Masterman's a better Christian than you."

"You speak as a rank atheist, Jack," said Timothy Waite. "And what sense there is in you is all spoiled because you're so fierce and sour."

"Not me — far from it. We was talking of Jehovah, I believe, and there's no law against free speech now, so I've a right to say my say without being called to order by you or any man. Tom here don't trust his God to bring rain when the glass is set fair;

and I say that he be perfectly right — that's all. Gollop ought to have the faith that moves mountains, no doubt; but he hasn't. He can't help feeling terrible shaky when it comes to a challenge. That's the good my side's doing, though he do swear at us. We're making the people common-sensible. Faith have had a long run for its money. Now we're going to give Works a bit of a show. Masterman fawns on Jehovah like a spaniel bitch, and thinks that all this shoe-licking be going to soften the God of the stars. But if there was a God, He'd be made of sterner stuff than man makes Him. We shouldn't get round Him, like a naughty boy round a weak father. In fact, you might so well try to stop a runaway steam-roller by offering it a cabbage-leaf, as to come round a working God by offering Him prayers."

"How you can stand this under your roof, Nathan, I'm blessed if I know," grumbled Mr. Gollop. "'Tis very evil speaking, and no good will come to you by it."

"Light will shine even on this man afore the end," declared the innkeeper. "God will explain as much as is good for Jack to know. He shows each of us as much as we can bear to see — like He did Moses. If Jehovah was to shine too bright on the likes of Head here, He'd dazzle the man and blind him."

"God will explain — eh? That's what you said, Nat. Then why don't He explain? I'm a reasonable man. I'm quite ready and willing to hear. But 'twill take God all His time to explain some of His hookem-snivey tricks played on honest, harmless humans. Let's hear first why He let the snake into the garden at all, to fool those two poor grown-up children. You talk about original sin! 'Tis a dirty lie against human nature. If you're in the right, 'twas your God sent it

— stuck the tree under Eve's nose — just as if I put a bunch of poison berries in a baby's hand and said, 'You mustn't eat 'em,' and then left the rest to chance and an enemy. Who'd be blamed if the child ate and died? Why, I should. And jury would bring it in murder — quite right too. Look at your God's blackguard doings against all they peaceful people He set His precious Jews against! Shameful, I call it. Driving 'em out of their countries, harrying 'em, killing 'em by miracles, because He knowed the Jews wasn't good men enough to do it. Chosen people! A pretty choice! He's been judging us ever since He made us; now let's judge Him a bit, and see what His games look like to the eyes of a decently taught Board School boy."

"You'll roast for this, John Head, and well you'll deserve it," said Mr. Gollop.

"Not I, Thomas. I've just as much right to crack a joke against your ugly, short-tempered Jehovah as you would have to laugh at the tuft of feathers on the end of a pole that foreign savages might call God. There's not a pin to choose betwixt them and you."

"We can only hope you'll have the light afore you've gone too far, Jack," said Nathan. "You're getting up home to sixty, and I'm sure I hope God's signal-post will rise up on your path afore you go much further."

"'Tis certainly time," answered Head. "And if your God's in earnest and wants to put me right, the sooner He begins the better for us both — for my salvation and His credit."

"He's got His holy self-respect, however," argued Gollop. "If I was Him, I'd not give myself a thought over the likes of you. 'Good riddance' — that's what I should say."

"If you was God for five minutes I wonder what

you'd do, Tom," speculated Joe Voysey. "Give me a new back, I hope. That's the first favour I should ax."

"I'd catch you up into heaven, Joe. That's the kindest thing the Almighty could do for you."

But Voysey looked doubtful.

"If you was to wait till I gived the word, 'twould be better," he said. "Nobody wants to leave his job unfinished."

"A good brain gone to rot — that's what's happened to you, Jack," said Nathan sadly. "Lord, He only knows why you are allowed to think such thoughts. No doubt there's a reason for it, since nought can happen without a reason; but the why and wherefore are hid from us common men, like much else that's puzzling. Anyway, we can stick to this — we Christians: though you've got no use for God, Jack, 'tis certain that God's got a use for you; and there may be those among us who will live to see what that use is."

"Well, I'm ready for a whisper," declared the freethinker. "He won't have to tell me twice — if He only makes His meaning clear the first time."

They talked a little longer, and then Heathman Lintern came among them.

"Be Jack Head here?" he asked. "The chimney to his house have took fire seemingly, and policeman's made a note of it. But 'twas pretty near out when I come by."

"Hell!" cried Jack. "That's another five shilling gone!"

He left hurriedly to the tune of laughter, and failed to hear Gollop's triumphant final argument.

"There! There!" shouted the sexton. "There 'tis — 'hell' in his everyday speech! He can't get away from it: 'tis part of nature and a common item — just as natural as heaven. And argue as he pleases,

the moment he's took out of himself, the truth slips. Well may he say 'hell'! There's nobody living round here will ever have more cause to say it. And that he'll find long afore I, or another, drop the clod on his bones."

CHAPTER X

THANKS more to the diplomacy of Nathan Baskerville than Ned's own skill in reconciliation, Cora forgave her lover and their marriage day was fixed. Not a few noticed that the master of 'The White Thorn' held this union much to heart, and indeed appeared more interested in its achievement than any other save Ned himself.

A change had come over Nathan and his strength failed him. The affection of his throat gained upon him and his voice grew weaker. He resented allusions to the fact and declared that he was well. Only his doctor and Priscilla Lintern knew the truth; and only she understood that much more than physical tribulation was responsible for the innkeeper's feverish activity of mind and unsleeping energy poured forth in secret upon affairs.

The extent of this immense diligence and devotion was hidden even from her. She supposed that a temporary cloud had passed away; and she ceased not, therefore, from begging him to save his powers and so afford himself an opportunity to recover.

But the man believed that he was doomed, and suspected that his life could only be held upon uncertain tenure of months.

The doctor would not go so far as this gloomy opinion; yet he did not deny that it might be justified.

Nathan felt no doubt in his own mind, and he believed that Cora's wedding was the last considerable event of a personal and precious nature that he could hope to see accomplished.

Afterwards, but not until he found himself upon his deathbed, the innkeeper designed a confession. Circumstances and justice, as he conceived it, must make this avowal private; but those most interested were destined to know the hidden truth concerning themselves. He had debated the matter with Priscilla, since decision rested with her; but she was of his mind and, indeed, had been the first to suggest this course.

Cora's shopping roused all the household of Undershaugh to a high pitch of exasperation. Much to the girl's surprise her mother produced fifty pounds for a wedding outfit, and the bride employed agreeable days in Plymouth while she expended this handsome gift.

A house had been taken at Plympton. The face of it was 'genteel' in Cora's estimation; but the back was not. However, the rear premises satisfied Ned, and its position with respect to town and country suited them both.

There remained contracts and settlements, in which Nathan Baskerville represented both parties. Ned was generous and indifferent; Cora exhibited interest and a faculty for grasping details. She told herself that it was only reasonable and wise to do so.

At any time the reckless Ned might break his neck; at any time the amorous Ned might find her not all-sufficing. No sentiment obscured Cora's outlook. She astounded Nathan Baskerville by the shrewdness of her stipulations.

Few prophesied much joy of this marriage, and even Priscilla, albeit Nathan was impatient at her doubts, none the less entertained misgivings. She knew the truth of her daughter, and had long since learned the truth concerning young Baskerville.

Those who desired to comfort her foretold that man and wife would go each their own way and mind

each their own business and pleasure. Not the most sanguine pretended to suppose that Ned and Cora would unite in any bonds of close and durable affection.

The man's mother trusted that Cora's common-sense and practical spirit might serve as a steady strain to curb his slothful nature; but May Baskerville was the only living soul who, out of her warm heart and trusting disposition, put faith in his marriage to lift her brother toward a seemly and steadfast position in the ranks of men.

At Hawk House the subject of the wedding might not be mentioned. In consequence renewed coolness had arisen between the brothers. Then came a rumour to Humphrey's ear that Nathan was ill, and he felt concern. The old man had no eye to mark physical changes. He was slow to discern moods or read the differences of facial expression, begot by mental trouble on the one hand and bodily suffering on the other.

Now, greatly to his surprise, he heard that Nathan began to be very seriously indisposed. The news came to him one morning a month before Cora's wedding. Heathman Lintern called upon the subject of a stallion, and mentioned casually that Humphrey's brother had lost his voice and might never regain it.

"'Tis terrible queer in the bar at 'The White Thorn' not to hear him and to know we never may no more," he said. "He's gone down and down very gradual; but now he can only whisper. 'Tis a wisht thing to lose the power of speech — like a living death, you might say."

"When did this happen? I've marked no change, though 'tis a good few weeks now since I spoke with him."

"It comed gradual, poor chap."

Humphrey rose and prepared on the instant to start for Shaugh.

"I must see the man," he said. "We're out for the minute owing to this wedding. But, since he's fallen ill, I must go to him. We'll hope 'tis of no account."

They set out together and Heathman was mildly surprised to learn the other's ignorance.

"He keeps it so close; but you can't hide your face. We've all marked it. The beard of the man's grown so white as if the snow had settled on it, and his cheeks be drawed too. For my part I never felt nothing in life to make me go down-daunted afore, except when your son Mark died; but, somehow, Nat Baskerville be a part of the place and the best part. I've got a great feeling towards him. 'Tis making us all very uncomfortable. Especially my mother. He talks to her a lot, feeling how more than common wise she be; and she knows a lot about him. She's terrible down over it and, in fact, 'tis a bad job all round, I'm afraid."

Humphrey's answer was to quicken his pace.

"He kept it from me," he replied. "I suppose he thought I ought to have seen it for myself. Or he might have wrongly fancied I didn't care."

"Everybody cares — such a wonderful good sort as him. 'Twill cast a gloom over this blessed wedding. I wish to God 'twas over and done with — the wedding, I mean — since it's got to be."

"Why do you wish that?"

"Because I'm sick of the thing and that awnself[1] baggage, my sister. God's truth! To watch her getting ready. Everything's got to go down afore her, like the grass afore the scythe. You may work your fingers to the bone and never get a thank you. I had a row with her last night, and she got lashing me with her tongue till I rose up and fetched her a damned

[1] *Awnself* — selfish.

hard box on the ear, grown woman though she is. My word, it tamed her too! 'There!' I said. 'That's better than all the words in the dictionary. You keep your snake's tongue between your teeth,' I said. There's no answering her with words, but if her husband has got a pinch of sense, which he hasn't, he'll do well to give her a hiding at the start. It acted like a charm."

"Don't want to hear nothing about that. They're making their own bed, and 'twill be uneasy lying," said Humphrey. "Leave them, and talk of other things."

"Very pleased," answered Lintern. "Ban't a subject I'm fond of. Undershaugh without Cora would be a better place to live in — I know that and I say it. And my mother knows it too; though say it she won't."

They talked on various subjects, and Heathman informed Mr. Baskerville that he would soon be a great-uncle.

"Rupert's wife be going to have a babby — that's the last news. I heard it yester-eve at 'The White Thorn.'"

"Is that so? They might have told me, you'd think. Yet none has. They kept it from me."

"Holding it for a surprise; or maybe they didn't think 'twould interest you."

"No doubt that was the reason," answered Humphrey.

And then he spoke no more, but worked his own thoughts into a ferment of jealous bitterness until the village was reached. Arrived, he took no leave of Heathman, but forgot his presence and hastened to the inn. Nathan was standing at the door in his apron, and the brothers entered together.

"What's this I hear?" said Humphrey as they entered the other's private chamber.

"Well, I'm ill, to be frank. In fact, very ill. I'd hoped to hide it up till after the wedding; but my voice has pretty well gone, you see. Gone for good. You'll never hear it again. But that won't trouble you much — eh?"

"I should have marked something wrong when last we met, no doubt. But you angered me a bit, and angry men are like drunken ones; their senses fail them. I didn't see or hear what had happed to you. Now I look and listen, I mark you're bad. What does the doctor say?"

"'Tis what he don't say. But I've got it out of him. He took me to Plymouth a month ago — to some very clever man there. I've talked such a lot in my life that I deserve to be struck dumb — such a chatterbox as I have been."

"Is that all?"

"For the present. We needn't go beyond that. I shall soon get used to listening instead of talking. Maybe I'll grow wiser for it."

"That wasn't all they told you?"

Nathan looked round and shut the door which stood ajar behind them.

"There's no hiding anything from you that you want to find out. As a matter of fact, I'm booked. I know it. 'Tis only a question of — of months — few or many. They give me time to put things as straight — as straight as I can."

"So like as not they lie. You'll do better to go off to London while you may, and get the best opinion up there."

"I would, if 'twas only to pleasure you. But that's no use now."

"Can you let down your food easy?"

Nathan shook his head.

"I dare not eat in company no more," he said;

"it's here." He put his hand to his throat and then drew it down.

"You don't suffer, I hope?"

Nathan nodded.

"I can tell you, but I trust you not to let it out to any soul. We must have the wedding off cheerful and bright. I shall keep going till then, if I'm careful. Only a month now."

"You ought to be lying up close, and never put your nose out this coarse weather."

"Time enough. Leave it now. I'm all right. I've had a good life — better than you might think for. I wish for my sake, and knowing that I've got my end in sight, you'd do the last thing you can for me and countenance this wedding. Perhaps I've no right to ask; but if you knew — if you knew how hard life can be when the flesh gives way and there's such a lot left to do and think about. If you only knew ——"

"You say 'the last thing I can do for you.' Are you sure of that?"

A strange and yearning expression crossed the face of the younger man. He stroked his beard nervously and Humphrey, now awake to physical accidents, marked that his hands were grown very thin and his skin had taken on it a yellowish tinge of colour.

There was silence between them for some moments. Then Nathan shook his head and forced a smile upon his face.

"Nothing else — nothing at all. But it's no small thing that I ask. I know that. You've a right to feel little affection for either of them — Ned or Cora. But my case is different. Cora's mother ——"

Again he stopped, but Humphrey did not speak.

"Cora's mother has been a good friend to me in many ways. She is a clever woman and can keep her

own counsel. There's more of Priscilla Lintern in Cora than you might think. You'll never know how terribly Cora felt Mark's death; but she did. Only she hid it close. As to Ned ——"

He began to cough and suffered evident pain in the process. When the cough ceased it was some time before he could speak. Then, to Humphrey's discomfort, his brother began to weep.

"There — there," he said, as one talks to a child. "What I can do, I'll do. God knows this is a harsh shock to me. I didn't dream of such a thing overtaking you. How old are you?"

"In my sixty-third year."

"Hope despite 'em. They don't know everything. Pray to the Almighty about it. You're weak. You ought to drink, if you can't eat. I'll come to the wedding and I'll give the woman a gift — for your sake and her mother's — not for her own."

Nathan, now unnerved, could not reply. But he took his brother's hand and held it.

"God bless you for this," he whispered. "If you could but understand me better and believe that with all my black faults I've meant well, I should die easier, Humphrey."

"Don't talk about dying. You're a bit low. I haven't forgotten when Mark went. Now 'tis my turn. Why don't you trust me?"

"You never trusted me, Humphrey."

The other darted a glance and Nathan's eyes fell.

"Never — and you were right not to," he added.

Humphrey rose.

"I'm your brother and your friend. I can't be different to what I am. I don't respect you — never did. But — well — a silly word most times, but I'll use it — I love you well enough. Why shouldn't I? You're my brother — all I've got left. I'm cut up about this.

I wish I could lighten your load, and I'm willing to do it if 'tis in my power."

"You have. If you come to that wedding I shall die a happy man."

"That's nought. Ban't there anything deeper I can do — for you yourself and your peace of mind?"

Again Nathan struggled with his desires. But pride kept him silent. He could not tell the truth.

"No," he answered at last. "Nothing for me myself."

"Or for any other?"

The innkeeper became agitated.

"No, no. You've done a good day's work. No more for the present. I've not thrown up the sponge yet. Will you take a glass of the old sloe gin before you go?"

Humphrey shook his head.

"Not for me. When's the wedding?"

"Third of November."

"I shall be there, and your — Cora Lintern will have a letter from me next week."

"You make me a happier man than you know, Humphrey."

"Let it rest then. I'll see you again o' Sunday."

They parted, and while one put on his hat and hastened with tremulous excitement to Undershaugh, the other breasted the hill homewards, and buttoned his coat to the wind which sent leaves flying in wild companies at the spinney edge by Beatland Corner.

The sick man rejoiced upon his way; the hale man went moodily.

"I can do no more," said Humphrey to himself. "He's a Baskerville, despite the grip of death on him. Perhaps I was a fool to tell him I didn't respect him. He'll think of it again when he's got time for thought by night, and 'twill rasp home."

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Following upon this incident it seemed for a season that Nathan's health mended. His disease delayed a little upon its progress, and he even hoped in secret that his brother might be right and the physicians wrong. He flashed with a spark of his old fire. He whispered jokes that woke noisy laughter. In secret he ticked off the days that remained before Ned and Cora should be married.

It wanted less than a fortnight to the event, and all was in readiness for it. Humphrey Baskerville had sent Cora twenty pounds, and she had visited him and thanked him personally for his goodness. The old man had also seen Ned, and although his nephew heard few compliments and came from the interview in a very indignant frame of mind, yet it was felt to be well that Humphrey had thus openly suffered the past to be obliterated.

Then came a midnight when Priscilla Lintern, lying awake and full of anxious thoughts, heard upon the silence a sound. At first she believed it to be the four feet of some wandering horse as he struck the ground with his hoofs in leisurely fashion, and slowly passed along the deserted road; then she perceived that it was the two feet of a man moving briskly and carrying him swiftly forward. The feet stopped, the outer wicket gate was opened, and some one came to the door. Priscilla's window looked forth from a thatched dormer above, and now she threw it up and leant out. She knew by intuition the name of the man below.

"Is that you, Jim?" she asked.

"Yes'm. Master's took cruel bad and can't fetch his breath. He knocked me up, and I went first for Miss Gollop, who was to home luckily. Then I comed for you."

Mrs. Lintern was already putting on her clothes.

"You'd best to go back," she said. "I'll be up over at once, after I've waked up my son and sent him riding for doctor."

Fifteen minutes later Heathman, still half asleep, cantered on a pony through a rainy night for medical help, and his mother hastened up to 'The White Thorn,' and steeled her heart for what she might find there.

She had long learned to conceal all emotion of spirit, and she knew that under no possible stress of grief or terror would truth have power to escape the prison of her heart.

CHAPTER XI

THE accident of a heavy cold had suddenly aggravated the morbid condition of Nathan Baskerville's throat, and set all doubt of the truth at rest. Often on previous occasions he had anticipated death at short notice, and prepared to face it; but now he trusted fate not to deal the final blow before his daughter's marriage. His only concern was to be on his feet again swiftly, that none of the plans for the wedding should be changed.

The doctor warned him that he was very ill, and took the gravest view of his condition; but Nathan, out of a sanguine heart, declared that he would make at least a transient recovery. He obeyed the medical man's directions very carefully, however; he kept his bed and put himself into the hands of the parish nurse.

In sombre triumph she came to this important case, and brought with her certain errors of judgment and idiosyncrasies of character that went far to counterbalance real ability begot of experience. She was a good nurse, but an obstinate and foolish woman. No more conscientious creature ruled a sick room or obeyed a doctor's mandate; but she added to her prescribed duties certain gratuitous moral ministrations which were not required by science or demanded by reason.

Mrs. Lintern saw Mr. Baskerville often, and sometimes shared the night watches with Eliza Gollop. The latter viewed her attentions to Nathan and her emotion before his suffering with a suspicious eye.

But she reserved comment until after the end. The case was not likely to be a long one in her opinion. For one week little happened of a definite character, and during that time Nathan Baskerville saw his relations and several of his more intimate friends. Then ensued a malignant change, and at the dawn of this deterioration, after the doctor had left him, Miss Gollop sat alone with her patient and endeavoured to elevate his emotions.

"I've flashed a bit of light on a wandering soul at many a deathbed," she declared; "and I hope I shall be spared to do so at many more. There's not a few men and women that wouldn't hear me in health, but they listened, meek as worms, when the end was in sight, and they hadn't strength left to move an eyelash. That's the time to drive truth home, Mr. Baskerville, and I've done it. But always cheerful, mind. I'm not the sort to give up hoping."

"I'm sure not," he whispered. "Wasn't Christ's first and last message hope?"

"Don't you talk. Let me do the talking. Yes, 'twas hope He brought into this hopeless world. But even hope can be trusted too much. You must put your hope in the next world now, not in this one, I'm afraid."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes — I knew he would. Death was in his eyes when he went out of your chamber. Still, there's plenty of time. Things may mend. He's going to send a new physic."

"What's the good of that if I've got to go?"

"You'll know presently, my poor man. 'Tis to ease what be bound to creep over you later on."

"Bodily pain's nought. Haven't I suffered all that man can suffer?"

"No, you haven't — not yet. Don't talk about

that part. You shan't suffer while I'm here — not if I can help it in reason, and under doctor's orders. But I won't stray beyond them; I was never known to take anything upon myself, like some of they hospital chits, that call themselves nurses, do."

"When is Mrs. Lintern coming?"

Eliza's lips tightened.

"Very soon, without a doubt; though why, I can't ezacally say. Listen to me a little afore she's here. 'Tis my duty to say these things to you, and you're not one that ever stood between man or woman and their duty."

"I'll not see them married now. That's cruel hard after ——"

"How can you say that? You may be there in the spirit, if not in the flesh. I suppose you ban't one of they godless ones that say ghosts don't walk? Haven't I beheld 'em with these eyes? Didn't I go down to Mrs. Wonnacott at Shaugh Bridge in the dimpsy of the evening two year ago; and didn't I see a wishtness coming along out of they claypits there? 'Tis well known I seed it; and if it weren't the spirit of Abraham Vosper, as worked there for fifty year and then was run over by his own team of hosses and fractured to death in five places, whose spirit was it? So you may be at your nephew's wedding with the best; and, for my part, I shall know you be there, and feel none the less cheerful for it."

"So much to do — so many to save — and no strength and no time — no time," he said.

The air was dark and hurtling with awful wings for Nathan Baskerville. He heard and saw the storm coming. But others would feel it. He was safe from the actual hurricane, but, by anticipation, dreadfully he endured it now. Death would be no release save from physical disaster. His place was with the living,

not with the dead. Cruelly the living must need him presently; the dead had no need of him.

Miss Gollop supposed that she read her patient's heart.

"'Tis your own soul you must seek to save, Mr. Baskerville. None can save our souls but ourselves. And as for time, thanks to the rivers of blood Christ shed, there's always time for a dip in 'em. You're well thought on. But that's nought. 'Tis the bird's-eye view the Almighty takes that will decide. And our conscience tells us what that view's like to be. 'Tis a good sign you be shaken about it. The best sort generally are. I've seen an evil liver go to his doom like a babby dropping asleep off its mother's nipple; and I've seen a pious saint, such as my own father was, get into a terrible tear at the finish, as if he seed all the devils in hell hotting up against his coming."

She ministered to the sick man, then sat down and droned on again. But he was not listening; his strength had nearly gone, his gaiety had vanished for ever. Not a smile was left. The next world at this juncture looked inexpressibly vain and futile. He cared not a straw about it. He was only concerned with his present environment and the significance of passing from it at this juncture.

"Run out — all run out!" he whispered to himself.

Would there be no final parenthesis of strength to deal with the manifold matters now tumbling to chaos? Was the end so near? He brushed aside lesser things and began to think of the one paramount obligation.

"Why don't she come? Why don't she come?" he whispered; but Miss Gollop did not hear him.

This was a sort of moment when she felt the call of

her faith mighty upon her. She had often inopportunely striven to drag a dying's man's mind away from earth to the spectacle of heaven and the immense difficulty of winning it.

"How many houses have you got, Mr. Baskerville?" she asked abruptly; and in a mechanical fashion he heard and answered her.

"Six — two here and four at Bickleigh; at least, they can't be called mine, I'm afraid, they're all ——"

"And you'd give the lot for one little corner in a heavenly mansion — wouldn't you, Mr. Baskerville?"

"No doubt — no doubt," he said. "Don't talk for a bit. I'm broken; I'm terrible anxious; I must see —— Give me something to drink, please."

While she obeyed him Mrs. Lintern came in. The doctor, who had perceived her tragic interest in the patient, kept her closely informed of his condition, and Priscilla had learned within the hour that Nathan was growing worse.

Now she came, and Mr. Baskerville asked Miss Gollop to leave them.

"I can't think why," murmured Eliza. "I'm not generally told to go out except afore relations. Still, I can take my walk now instead of this afternoon. And if the new physic comes, don't you give him none, Mrs. Lintern, please. 'Tis very powerful and dangerous, and only for skilled hands to handle."

Neither spoke until the nurse had departed.

"And I shall be gone exactly twenty minutes and no more," she said. "I've got my reputation, I believe, if some of us haven't; but with chapel people ——"

The exact problem respecting chapel people she left unstated, and in closing the door behind her made some unnecessary noise.

Then Priscilla folded Nathan in her arms and kissed

him. He held her hand and shut his eyes while she talked; but presently he roused himself and indicated that the confession to his children must not in safety be longer delayed.

"I don't feel particular worse, though I had a bit of a fight for wind last night; but I am worse, and I may soon be a lot worse. They'd better all come to-day — this afternoon."

"They shall," she promised.

"If that was all — my God, if that was all, Priscilla!"

"It is all that matters."

"'Tis the least — the very least of it. Dark — dark wherever I turn. Plots miscarried, plans failed, good intentions all gone astray."

She thought that he wandered.

"Don't talk, 'tis bad for you. If you've got to go, go you must — God pity me without you! But you are all right, such a steadfast man as you. The poor will call you blessed, and your full tale of well-doing will never be told."

"Well-meaning, that's all — not well-doing. A dead man's motives don't count, 'tis his deeds we rate him by. He's gone. He can't explain what he meant. Pray for me to live a bit longer, Priscilla. Beg 'em for their prayers at the chapel; beg 'em for their prayers at church. I'm terrible, terrible frighted to go just now, and that's truth. Frighted for those I leave — for those I leave."

She calmed him and sought to banish his fears. But he entered upon a phase of mental excitement, deepening to frenzy. He was bathed in sweat and staring fixedly before him when the nurse returned.

After noon the man had regained his nerve and found himself ready for the ordeal. A dose of the new drug brought ease and peace. He was astonished and

sanguine to feel such comfort. But his voice from the strain of the morning had almost become extinguished.

When Priscilla and his children came round him and the family were alone, he bade the woman speak.

"Tell them," he said. "I'm not feared to do it, since you wish them to know, but my throat is dumb."

Heathman stood at the bottom of the bed and his mother sat beside it. Cora and Phyllis were in chairs by the fire. They looked and saw Mrs. Lintern clasp her hands over Nathan Baskerville's. The act inspired her, and she met the astonished glances of her children.

"For all these years," she said, "you've been kept without hearing the truth, you three. You only knew I was a widow, and that Mr. Baskerville was a widower, and that we were friends always, and that he never married again because his dead wife didn't want him to. But there's more to know. After Mrs. Baskerville died, Nathan here found me an orphan girl, working for my living in a china and glass shop at Bath. I hadn't a relation or friend in the world, and he got to love me, and he wanted to marry me. But I wouldn't have it, because, in honour to his wife's relations, if he'd married me he'd have had to give up five thousand pound. And they would have taken very good care he did so. The law was his side, but truth was against it, since his wife gave him the money only if he didn't wed. She couldn't enforce such a thing, but he acted as if she could. I went to live with him, and you three children were born. Then, a bit after, he came back here, and of course I came with him. He's your father, but there's no call for any else to know it but us. I don't care, and never shall care if everybody knows it. A better man won't breathe God's air in this world than

your father, and no woman have been blessed with a kinder husband in the eye of the Almighty. But there's you three to think of, and 'twould be against you if this was known now. He didn't even want to tell you; but I was determined that you should know it afore either of us died. And now it's pleased God to shorten your dear father's days; and you've got to hear that he is your father."

There was a silence.

"I ask them to forgive me," whispered Nathan Baskerville. "I ask my son and my daughters to forgive me for what I've done."

"No need for that," answered Priscilla. "Lie down and be easy, and don't get excited."

He had sat up and was holding his beard, and stroking it nervously.

Mrs. Lintern shook his pillow and took his hand again. Then she looked at her son, who stood with his mouth open, staring at the sick man. His expression indicated no dismay, but immense astonishment.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "This beats cock-fighting! You my father! And now you'm going to drop out—just when I might have been some use to you. There! what a 'mazing thing, to be sure."

"Call him by his right name then—for my sake, Heathman," urged his mother.

"Why—good God!—I will for his own," answered the man. "I don't care a curse about such things as laws and all the rest of it. He's been a rare good sort all his life; and no man could have a better father, whichever side the blanket he was got. I'll call him father, and welcome, and I wish to Christ he wasn't going to die."

Heathman came and took Nathan's hand, and his mother broke down at his words, buried her face in the counterpane and wept.

"Tell them to come over," whispered Mr. Baskerville to his son. "And thank you, and God bless you, son. You've done more than you know to lighten a cruel load."

"Come here, you two, and kiss your father," said Heathman.

The girls came, and first Phyllis kissed Nathan nervously, and then the touch that he hungered for rested a moment on his cheek. With Cora's kiss the tension subsided; he sank back, and Priscilla drew the sheet up to his beard, and again lifted the pillow.

"Now I shall go in some sort of peace, though an erring and a sinful man," he murmured. "If you can forgive me, so will my Saviour. And let this secret be a secret for ever. Remember that, all of you. 'Tis beyond human power to make you legitimate Baskervilles; but Baskervilles you are, and, please God, will lead a better and wiser life than I have led. No need to tell anybody the truth. Forgive your father, and forget him so soon as ever you can; but worship your mother always — to your dying day worship her; protect her and shield her, and stand between her and the rough wind, and be proud of having such a blessed brave woman for a mother."

"You needn't tell me that," said Heathman.

The other stopped, but held up his hand for silence. After a little rest he proceeded.

"The time's coming when she will need all the love and wit you've got among you. 'Tis no good talking much about that, and I haven't the human courage left to meet your hard faces, or tears, or frowns. All I say is, forgive me, and love your mother through thick and thin. All the blame is mine — none of it belongs to her."

He held his hand out to Cora. She was sitting on the edge of the bed looking out of the window.

"You'll remember, my Cora," he said. "And — and let me hear you call me 'father' just once — if you can bring yourself to do it."

"The money, dear father?" she asked.

He smiled, and it was the last time that he ever did so.

"Like my sensible Cora," he answered. But he did not continue the subject.

"You'd best all to go now," declared Priscilla. She rose and looked straight into the eyes of her children each in turn. The girls flinched; the son went to her and kissed her.

"Don't you think this will make any difference to me," said Heathman. "You're a damned sight too good a mother for me, whether or no — or for them women either; and this man here — our father, I should say — needn't worrit about you, for I'll always put you afore anything else in the world."

"And so will I, mother," said Phyllis.

"Of course, we all will," added Cora; "and the great thing must be for us all to keep as dumb as newts about it. 'Twould never do for it to come out — for mother's sake more than ours, even. I don't say if for our sakes, but for mother's sake, and for father's good name, too."

"Such wisdom — such wisdom!" said Nathan. "You've all treated me better than I deserved — far better. And God will reward you for such high forgiveness to a wicked wretch. I'll see you all again once before I die. Promise that. Promise you'll come again, Cora."

"I will come again," she said; "and please, father, make mother promise on her oath to be quiet and sensible and not run no risks. If it got out now — you never know. We're above such small things, but many people would cold shoulder us if they heard of it. You know what people are."

Her mother looked at her without love. The girl was excited; she began to appreciate the significance of what she had heard; her eyes were wet and her voice shook.

"I'll be 'quiet and sensible,' Cora Lintern," said the mother. "I've been 'quiet and sensible' for a good many years, I believe, and I shan't begin to be noisy and foolish now. You're quite safe. Better you all go away now and leave us for the present."

They departed silently, and, once below, the girls crept off together, like guilty things, to their home, while Lintern dallied in the bar below and drank. He was perfectly indifferent to the serious side of his discovery, and, save for his mother's sake, would have liked to tell the men in the bar all about it. He regarded it rather as a matter of congratulation than not. No spark of mercenary feeling touched his emotion. That he was a rich man's son had not yet occurred to him; but that he was a good man's son and a popular man's son pleased him.

Mrs. Lintern suffered no detraction in his eyes. He felt wonder when he considered her power of hiding this secret for so many years, and he experienced honest sorrow for her that the long clandestine union was now to end. The day's event, indeed, merely added fuel to the flame of his affection for her.

But it was otherwise with the sisters. Phyllis usually took on the colour of Cora's thought, and now the elder, with no little perspicacity, examined the situation from every point of view.

"The only really bright side it's got is that there'll be plenty of money, I suppose. I'd give a sovereign, Phyllis, to see the will. Father — how funny it sounds to say it — poor father was always terrible fond of me, and I've often wondered why for. Now, of course, 'tis easy to explain."

"What about the wedding?" asked Phyllis. "'Twill have to be cruel quiet now, I suppose."

"Certainly not," answered her sister. "'Twill have to be put off, that's all. I won't have a scrubbly little wedding smothered up in half mourning, or some such thing; but, come to think of it, we shan't figure among the mourners in any case — though we shall be among them really. 'Twill be terrible difficult to help giving ourselves away over this. I think the best thing would be for mother to take the money and clear out, and go and live somewhere else — the further off the better. For that matter, when the will's read, everybody will guess how it is."

"Heathman might go on with the public-house."

"Yes, he might. But I hope he'll do no such thing," answered her sister. "He's always the thorn in my side, and always will be. Don't know the meaning of the word 'decency.' However, he's not like to trouble us much when we're married. I shan't be sorry to change my name now, Phyllis. And the sooner you cease to be called Lintern, too, the better."

"About mother?"

"I shouldn't presume to say a word about mother, one way or the other," answered Cora. "I'm not a fool, and I'm not going to trouble myself about the things that other people do; but all the same, I shall be glad to get out of it and start with a clean slate among a different class of people."

"What amazing cleverness to hide it all their lives like that," speculated Phyllis. "I'm sure us never would have been so clever as to do it."

"It became a habit, no doubt. 'Twas salt to their lives, I reckon, and made 'em all the fonder of each other," declared Cora. "Everyday married life must have looked terrible tame to them — doing what they did. Their time was one long love-making in secret."

"I'm awful sorry for mother now, though," continued Phyllis; "because when he dies she can't put on weeds and go and hear the funeral sermon, and do all the things a proper widow does do."

"No," admitted her sister; "that she certainly can't. She'll have to hide the truth pretty close from this day forward, that's very clear. She owes that to me — and to you; and I shall see she pays her debt."

"She will, of course," replied the other. "She's a terrible brave woman, and always has been. She'll hide it up close enough — so close as we shall, for that matter. Heathman's the only one who's like to let it out. You know what a careless creature he is."

Cora frowned.

"I do," she said. "And I know there's no love lost between him and me. A coarse man, he is, and don't care what gutter he chooses his friends out of. Take one thing with another, it might be so well to marry Ned at the appointed time, and get it hard and fast."

So they talked, and misprized Heathman from the frosty standpoint of their own hearts. Rather than bring one shadow on his mother's fame, the brother of these girls would have bitten out his tongue and swallowed it.

CHAPTER XII

NATHAN BASKERVILLE'S bedroom faced the south. A text was nailed upon the wall over his head, and an old photograph of his father stood upon the mantelpiece. To right and left of this memorial appeared trinkets made of shells. A pair of old carriage lamps, precious from association, decorated either end of the mantelshelf. An old print of Niagara Falls, that his mother had valued, was nailed above it.

A white curtain covered the window, but there was no blind, for this man always welcomed daylight. On the window-ledge there languished a cactus in a pot. It was a gift under the will of an old dead woman who had tended it and cherished it for twenty years. One easy chair stood beside the bed, and on a table at hand were food and medicine.

Many came to see the dying man, and Humphrey Baskerville visited him twice or thrice in every week.

More than once Nathan had desired to speak of private matters to his brother, but now he lacked the courage, and soon all inclination to discuss mundane affairs departed from him.

There followed a feverish week, in which Nathan only desired to listen to religious conversation. Recorded promises of hope for the sinner were his penultimate interest on earth. He made use of a strange expression very often, and desired again and again to hear the Bible narrative that embraced it.

"'This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,'" he said to Humphrey and to many others. "I cling to that. It was spoken to a thief and a failure."

All strove to comfort him, but a great mental incubus haunted his declining hours. His old sanguine character seemed entirely to have perished; and its place was taken by spirits of darkness and of terror.

"'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,'" he said to Eliza Gollop, when she was alone with him. "If I'd marked that better, I might now have got beyond that stage and learned to love Him. But I'm in fear — my life hasn't took me further than that — all's fearful still."

"No need in your case, I hope, so far as mortal man can say," she answered. "'Tis natural to be uneasy when the journey's end falls in sight; and we all ought to be. But then comes Christ and casts out fear. You've a right, so far as man can say, to trust Him and fear nought."

"But man doesn't know. Yet He forgave the dying thief."

"He did so, though us have no right to say whether 'twas a bit of rare kindness in Him, or whether he made a practice of it. But for my part I steadfastly believe that He do forgive everything but the sin against the Holy Ghost. Of course, that's beyond His power, and would never do."

Mrs. Lintern spent much time at 'The White Thorn,' and since her visits relieved Eliza of work, she acquiesced in them, while reserving the right of private judgment. Priscilla and her children all saw the sufferer together more than once; and then came a day when Heathman, Cora, and Phyllis took their leave of him.

The young man then secreted his emotion and roamed for an hour alone upon the Moor; the girls felt it but little.

Cora declared afterwards to Phyllis that since this great confession had been made, her mind dimly re-

membered her tender youth and a man in it. This man she had regarded as her father.

All the children were deceived at an early age. They had, indeed, been led implicitly to suppose that their father died soon after the birth of Phyllis.

One last conversation with his brother, Humphrey long remembered. It was the final occasion on which Nathan seemed acutely conscious, and his uneasiness of mind clearly appeared.

They were alone, and the elder perceived that Nathan desired and yet feared to make some statement of a personal character. That he might ease the other's mind and open the way to any special conversation he desired, Mr. Baskerville uttered certain general speeches concerning their past, their parents, and the different characteristics of temperament that had belonged to Vivian and themselves.

"We were all as opposite as men can be, and looked at life opposite, and set ourselves to win opposite good from it. Who shall say which comes out best? On the whole, perhaps Vivian did. He died without a doubt. There are some men bound to be pretty happy through native stupidity and the lack of power to feel; and there are some men — mighty few — rise as high as happiness, and glimpse content by the riches of their native wisdom. I've found the real fools and the real wise men both seem to be happy. A small brain keeps a man cheerful as a bird, and a big one leads to what's higher than cheerfulness; but 'tis the middle bulk of us be so often miserable. We'm too witty to feed on the fool's pap of ignorance; and not witty enough to know the top of wisdom. I speak for myself in that; but you've been a happy, hopeful man all your days; so belike, after all, you're wiser than I granted you to be."

"Me wise! My God! Don't you say that. My

happiness was a fool's happiness; my laughter a fool's laughter all the time. At least — not all the time; but at first. We do the mad things at the mad age, and after, when the bill comes in — to find us grown up and in our right minds — we curse Nature for not giving us the brains first and the powers afterwards. Man's days be a cruel knife in the hand of a child. Too often the heedless wretch cuts hisself afore he's learned how to handle it, and carries the scar for ever."

"True for you. Nature's a terrible poor master, as I've always said, and always shall. We know it; but who stands up between a young man and his youth to protect him therefrom? We old blids see 'em thinking the same vain things, and doing the same vain things, and burning their fingers and scorching their hearts at the same vain fires; and we look on and grin, like the idiots we are, and make no effort to help 'em. Not you, though — not you. You was always the young man's friend. You never was a young man yourself exactly. An old head on young shoulders you always carried; and so did I."

"Don't think it — not of me. 'Tisn't so. No man was madder than me; none was crueller; none committed worse sins for others' backs to bear. The best that any man will be able to say of me a month after I'm in my grave is that I meant well. And maybe not many will even say that. Death's no evil to me, Humphrey, but dying now is a very cruel evil, I assure you. The cloud lies behind, not in front."

"So it does with every man struck down in the midst of his work. Shall you write your own verse according to our old custom?"

The other shook his head.

"No. I'll stick up no pious thought for men to

spit upon when they pass my grave. I'd rather that no stone marked it. 'Twill be remembered — in one heart — and that's more than ever I'll deserve."

"Don't be downcast. Leave afterwards to me. I think better of you for hearing you talk like this. You tried to brace me against the death of my son; now I'll brace you against your own death. You don't fear the thing, and that's to the good. But, like all busy men, it finds you with a lot of threads tangled, I suppose. That's the fate of every one who tries to do other people's work besides his own, and takes off the shoulders of others what properly belongs there. They'll have to look to their own affairs all round when you go."

Nathan's answer was a groan, and with the return of the nurse, Humphrey went away.

From that hour the final phases of the illness began; suffering dimmed the patient's mind, and turned his thoughts away from everything but his own physical struggle between the intervals of sleep. His torments increased; his consciousness, flinging over all else, was reduced to its last earthly interest. He kept his eyes and his attention ceaselessly fixed upon one thing so long as his mind continued under his control.

Not grief at the past; not concern at the future; not the face of Priscilla, and not the touch of her hand absorbed his intelligence now; but the sight of a small bottle that held the anodyne to his misery. That he steadfastly regarded, and pointed impatiently to the clock upon the mantelpiece when the blessed hour of administration struck.

The medicine was guarded jealously by Eliza Gollop, and once, when frenzied at the man's sufferings, Priscilla had sought to administer a dose, the other woman came between and sharply rebuked her.

"It's death!" she whispered under her voice.

"D'you want to murder him? He's taking just what the doctor allows — the utmost limit."

After three days of unutterable grief, Nathan's brother became aware of the situation, and perceived that the end tarried. He debated on this long-drawn horror for a night, and next day spoke to the doctor.

He put the case without evasion or obscurity, and the professional man heard him in patience and explained at once his deep sympathy and his utter powerlessness to do more.

"He's dying — you grant that?"

"Certainly, he's dying — the quicker the better now, poor fellow. The glands are involved, and the end must come tolerably soon."

"How long?"

"Impossible to say. A few days probably. He keeps his strength wonderfully well."

"But it would be better if he didn't? Wouldn't it be better if he died to-night?"

"Much — for all our sakes," admitted the physician.

"Can't you help him out of it, then?"

"Impossible."

"Why? You'd do as much for a horse or dog."

"My business is to prolong life, not hasten death. The profession recognises no interference of that sort."

"Who knows anything about it? A dying man dies, and there's an end."

"I cannot listen to you, Mr. Baskerville. We must think of the greatest good and the greatest safety to the greatest number. The law is very definite in this matter, and I have my profession to consider. You look at an individual case; the law looks at the larger question of what is convenient for a State. Your brother is having medicinal doses of morphia as often as it is possible to give them to him without danger to life."

"In fact, Nature must kill him her own hard way."

"Much is being done to lessen his pain."

"But a double dose of your physic would ——"

"End his life."

"How?"

"He would become unconscious and in three, or possibly four, hours he would die."

"You'd call that murder?"

"That is the only name for it as the law stands."

"You won't do that?"

"No, Mr. Baskerville. I wish I could help him. But, in a word, I have no power to do so."

"Is it because you think 'twould be a wrong thing, or because you know 'tis unlawful?" asked the elder. "You might say 'twas impertinent to ask it, as it touches religion; but I'm ignorant and old, and want to know how it looks to the conscience of a learned man like you — you, that have been educated in all manner of deep subjects and the secrets of life."

The doctor reflected. He was experienced and efficient; but like many other professional men, he had refused his reason any entrance into the arcanum of his religious opinions. These were of the customary nebulous character, based on tradition, on convention, on the necessity for pleasing all in a general practice, on the murmur of a mother's voice in his childhood.

"I am a Christian," he said. "And I think it wrong to lessen by one moment the appointed life of any man."

"But not wrong to lengthen it?"

"That we cannot do."

"Then surely you cannot shorten it, either? Tell me this, sir: why would you poison a dog that's dying, so that its misery may be ended?"

"I will not argue about it. The cases are not par-

allel. Common humanity would, of course, put a period to the agony of any unconscious beast."

"But wouldn't free an immortal soul from its perishing dirt?"

"No. I am diminishing his pain enormously. I can do no more. Remember, Mr. Baskerville, that our Lord and Master *healed* the sick and restored the dead to life. He never shortened any man's days; He prolonged them."

"I'm answered," replied the elder. "Your conscience is — where it should be: on the side of the law. I'm answered; but I'm not convinced."

They parted, and Humphrey found the other's argument not strong enough to satisfy him. He wrestled with the problem for some time and ere long his impression grew into a conviction, his conviction ripened to a resolve.

In the afternoon of that day he returned to 'The White Thorn' and found Mrs. Lintern with his brother.

Eliza had gone out for a while. Nathan appeared to be half unconscious, but his mind clearly pursued some private train of thought.

Priscilla rose from her chair beside the bed and shook hands with Humphrey. Nathan spoke, but not to them.

"A mighty man of valour. His burning words melted the wax in a man's ears, I warn you. . . . Melted the wax in a man's ears. . . . Melted the wax. . . . Oh, Christ, help me! Isn't it time for the medicine yet?"

He stared at the bottle. It was placed on a bracket in his sight.

"What did the doctor say to-day?" asked Humphrey.

"Said it was wonderful — the strength. There's

nothing to stop him living three or four days yet."

"D'you want him to?"

"My God, no! I'd — I'd do all a woman could do to end it."

Humphrey regarded her searchingly.

"Will he come to his consciousness again?"

"I asked the doctor the same question. He said he might, but it was doubtful."

The sick man groaned. Agony had long stamped its impress on his face.

"When is he to have the medicine?"

"When Miss Gollop comes back," she said. "There's an hour yet. The Lord knows what an hour is to me, watching. What must it be to him?"

"Why, it may be a lifetime to him — a whole lifetime of torment yet before he's gone," admitted Humphrey.

"I pray to God day and night to take him. If I could only bear it for him!"

Mr. Baskerville knelt beside his brother, spoke loudly, squeezed the sufferer's hand and tried to rouse him.

"My physic, Eliza, for your humanity, Eliza — the clock's struck — I heard it — I swear — oh, my merciful Maker, why can't I have it?"

He writhed in slow suffocation.

"I'll give him his medicine," said Humphrey. "This shan't go on."

"She'll make trouble if you do."

"I hope not, and it's no great matter if she does."

He crossed the room, examined the bottle, took it to the light and poured out rather more than a double dose. He crossed the room with it, heaved a long breath, steadied himself and then put his arm round his brother and lifted him.

"Here you are, Nat. You'll sleep awhile after this. 'Twill soon ease you."

Nathan Baskerville seized the glass like one perishing of thirst, and drank eagerly.

He continued to talk a little afterwards, but was swiftly easier. Presently the drug silenced him and he lay still.

Humphrey looked at his watch.

"I can tell you," he said. "Because you'll understand. His troubles are ended for ever now. He won't have another pang. I've taken it upon myself. You're a wise and patient woman. You've got other secrets. Better keep this with the rest."

He was excited. His forehead grew wet and he mopped it with the sheet of the bed.

Priscilla did not reply; but she went on her knees beside Nathan and listened.

"At six o'clock, or maybe a bit earlier, he'll stop. Till then he'll sleep in peace. When does Eliza Gollop come back?"

"After four."

"I'll wait then."

"You're a brave man. 'Tisn't many would do so much as that, even for a brother."

"Do as you would be done by covers it. 'Tis a disgrace to the living that dying men should suffer worse terror and pain than dying beasts. Terror they must, perhaps, since they can think; but pain — no need for that."

"I'll bless you for this to my own last day," she said. She rose then and fetched a chair. She held Nathan's hand. He was insensible and breathing faintly but easily.

Suddenly Mrs. Lintern got up and hastened across the room to the medicine bottle.

"We must think of that," she said.

"Leave it. He's had enough."

"He's had too much," she answered. "There's the danger. When that woman comes back she'll know to half a drop what's gone. She guessed the wish in me to do this very thing two days ago. She read it in my eyes, I believe. And God knows the will was in my heart; but I hadn't the courage."

"Let her find out."

"No—not her. Some—perhaps many—wouldn't matter; but not her."

Priscilla took the bottle, lifted it and let it fall upon the floor. It broke, and the medicine was spilled.

"There," she said. "That will answer the purpose. You had given him his dose and, putting the bottle back, it broke. I'll send Heathman off quick to Yelverton for another bottle, so it shall be here before the next dose is due. Then you won't be suspected."

He listened, and perceived how easily came the devious thought to her swift mind. It did not astonish him that she was skilled in the art to deceive.

"I've taken the chances—all of them," he said. "I've thought long about this. I needn't have told you to keep the secret, for it can't be kept. And I don't want it to be kept really. You can't hide it from the nurse. She'll know by the peace of poor Nat here how it is."

Priscilla looked again. Profound calm brooded over the busy man of Shaugh Prior. He was sinking out of life without one tremor.

"There's an awful side to it," the woman murmured.

"There was," he said. "The awfulness was to see Nature strangling him by inches. There's nought awful now, but the awfulness of all death. 'Tis meant to be an awful thing to the living—not to the dying."

For half an hour they sat silent. Then Priscilla lifted the clothes and put her hand to Nathan's feet.

"He's cold," she said.

"Cold or heat are all one to him now."

A little later Eliza Gollop returned. She came at the exact hour for administration of the medicine, and she sought the bottle before she took off her bonnet and cloak.

"Where — why ——?" she cried out.

"I gave him his physic a bit ago," said Mr. Baskerville. "The bottle is broke."

The nurse hurried to her patient and examined him closely. She perceived the change.

"He's dying!" she said.

"So he was when you went away."

"But ——"

She broke off and panted into anger.

"You've — you've — this is murder — I won't stop in the house. I — oh, you wicked woman!"

She turned upon Mrs. Lintern and poured out a torrent of invective.

Then Humphrey took her by the shoulders and put her out of the room.

"You can go," he said. "You'll not be wanted any more."

She hastened from the inn and then went off to the vicarage as fast as her legs would carry her.

Another half-hour passed and none came to them. From time to time Priscilla put her ear to Nathan's face.

"I don't think he's breathing any more," she said.

Then came a noise and a grumbling of men's voices below. A violent strife of words clashed in the bar. The day had waned and it was growing dark.

"They'll be against you, I'm fearing," said Priscilla.

"'Tis of no account. They always are."

Presently Dennis Masterman entered the room.

"I hear poor Baskerville is going and they can't find his minister. Can I be of any comfort to him?"

He made no allusion to the things that he had heard, and Humphrey did not immediately answer him. He was leaning over his brother. Then he took out his watch, opened it, and put the polished inner case to Nathan's lips.

"Light a candle and bring it here," he said to Priscilla.

She obeyed, and he examined the polished metal.

"No stain — he's dead, I suppose."

Then Mr. Baskerville turned to the clergyman.

"If you can pray, I'll be glad for you to do it."

Dennis immediately knelt down; the old man also went slowly on his knees and the weeping woman did the same.

"O Almighty God, Who has been pleased to take our brother from his sufferings and liberate an immortal soul from mortal clay, be Thou beside him now, that he may pass over the dark river with his hand in his Saviour's, and enter as a good and faithful servant into the joy of his Lord. And support the sorrows of those who — who cared for him on earth, and help them and all men to profit by the lesson of his charity and lovingkindness and ready ear for the trouble of his fellow-creatures. Let us walk in the way that he walked, and pass in peace at the end as he has passed. And this we beg for the sake of our Mediator and Comforter, our Blessed Lord and Redeemer, Thy Son, Jesus Christ."

"Amen," said Mr. Baskerville, "and thank you."

He rose, cast one glance at the grief-stricken woman by the bed, then looked upon his brother and then prepared to depart.

But he returned for a moment.

"Will you do the rest?" he asked of Mrs. Lintern. "Or shall I tell 'em to send?"

"No, I daren't. Tell him to send. I must go home," she answered.

A loud noise persisted in the bar, but he did not enter it. He took his hat and an old umbrella from the corner of the sick-room, then descended and went out into the night.

CHAPTER XIII

THE doctor who attended Nathan Baskerville in his last illness heard from Eliza Gollop what had been done, and he took a serious view of it. From the standpoint of his opinions Humphrey Baskerville had struck a blow at society and the established order.

The physician was sober-minded and earnest. He communicated with the coroner of the district, stated the case impartially and left the official to act as seemed proper to him. But the coroner was also a medical man, and he reduced the problem to its simplest possible dimensions.

Death had been hastened by an uncertain measure of time for one who was enduring extreme agony. He judged the case on its own merits, after a rare judicial faculty peculiar to himself. He made no effort to consider its general bearing and tendency; he did not enlarge his survey to the principles involved. His sympathy was entirely on the side of Humphrey Baskerville; he applauded the old man in his heart and declared no inquest necessary. None was therefore held.

Those interested in Nathan's end took opposite views, and as for Humphrey himself, he was hidden for a time from the people and did not appear again in public until his brother's funeral. He failed, therefore, to learn the public opinion.

Jack Head and those who thought as he did, upheld the action; but not a few shared the faith of Thomas Gollop, openly expressed at the bar of 'The White Thorn' while still the dead master lay above.

For two days Nathan kept a sort of humble state,

and the folk from far and near enjoyed the spectacle of his corpse. Many tramped ten miles to see him. The humblest people appeared; the most unexpected persons acknowledged debts of unrecorded kindness. He lay in his coffin with a face placid and small behind the bush of his silver beard. Women wept at the sight and took a morbid joy in touching his folded hands.

Then he was hidden for ever and carried with difficulty down the narrow and winding stair of the inn.

Thomas Gollop dug the grave and Joe Voysey helped him. No younger men assisted them. They felt a sort of sentiment in the matter.

"'Tis the last pit I shall open, Joe," said Mr. Gollop; "and for my part, if I had my way, I shouldn't make it very deep. In these cases the law, though slow, is sure, and it may come about that he'll have to be digged up again inside a month to prove murder against that dark, awful man to Hawk House."

"'Tis the point of view. I don't look at it quite the same. For my part, in my business, I see a lot of death—not men but plants. And when a bush or what not be going home, I don't stand in the way. 'No good tinkering,' I often says to Miss Masterman, for the silly woman seems to think a gardener can stand between a plant and death. 'The herb be going home,' I says, 'and us can't stay the appointed time.' 'But I don't want it to go home—it mustn't go home,' she'll answer me—like a silly child talking. However, when her back be turned, I do my duty. The bonfire's the place. Jack Head looked over the kitchen-garden wall a bit agone and seed me firing up; and he said, 'Ah, Joe, your bonfire's like charity: it covers a multitude of sins!' A biting tongue that man hath!"

Joe chuckled at the recollection, but Gollop was not amused.

"A plant and a man are very different," he answered. "Scripture tells us that the fire is the place for the withered branch, but where there's a soul working out its salvation in fear and trembling, who be we worms to stand up and say 'go'?"

"It might be the Lord put it in Mr. Baskerville's heart," argued Voysey.

"The Lord ban't in the habit of putting murder in people's hearts, I believe."

"You didn't ought to use the word. He might have you up if he come to hear it."

"I wish he would; I only wish he would," declared Thomas. "Fearless you'd find me, with Eliza's evidence behind me, I can promise you. But not him: he knows too well for that."

They stood and rested where Nathan's grave began to yawn beside that of his brother. White marble shone out above Vivian, and not only his farewell verse, but also a palestric trophy representing the old wrestler's championship belt, was carved there.

"'Twill make history in more ways than one—this death will," foretold Thomas.

"What do you think? Parson's going to help with the funeral!"

"Why not?"

"'Why not?' You ask that! Nat was a Dissenter and his dissenting minister be going to bury him; but Masterman says, seeing how highly thought upon he was by all parties, that it becomes all parties to be at his grave. And he's going to be there; and if the bishop comed to learn of it, there'd be a flare-up that might shake England in my opinion."

"If his reverence says he'll be there, there he'll be."

"I don't doubt that. My belief is that all's well knowed at headquarters, and they're giving the man

rope enough to hang hisself with. This may be the last straw."

Comforted by the reflection, Thomas resumed his labours.

"He'll lie cheek by jowl with his brother," he said. "Go easy in that corner, Joe; us'll be getting to the shoulder of Vivian's bricks afore long."

The circumstance of Nathan's passing had been received with very real grief by most of his relations. Even distant kindred mourned and not a few of the race, who were strangers to the Baskervilles of Shaugh Prior, appeared at the funeral. Mrs. Baskerville of Cadworthy felt helpless and faced almost with a second widowhood, for all her financial affairs had rested in Nathan's willing hand since her husband died. Her daughters also mourned in very genuine fashion. Their uncle had been kind, helpful, and generous to them. Only Mr. Bassett did not greatly suffer, for now he knew that his wife must inherit her own and hoped, indeed, for some addition under the will of the departed innkeeper.

As for Rupert Baskerville, he endured very real grief; but Ned was too concerned with the bearing of this event on his own affairs to feel it deeply. He would now be free to administer his capital as he pleased. Only his mother stood between. One black cloud, however, thrust itself upon his immediate future. His wedding was postponed. Cora insisted upon it, and her mother supported her. Their motives were widely different, but they arrived at the same conclusion.

Priscilla hid her grief from all eyes but her son's; while he, less skilled, surprised the folk by his evident sorrow. They failed to understand it, and acute people laughed, judged it to be simulation, and despised the man for his display. Cora and Phyllis neither pre-

tended nor felt grief. The elder had talked her sister round, and they arrived at a perfectly rational conclusion. It was averse from their father. It led them to regard him as a selfish and a cruel man. They considered also that he had deceived himself, and wickedly wronged the unborn that he might perform a far-fetched obligation to the dead.

Cora put the case very clearly.

"Mother won't see it, and 'tis vain to try to make her; and Heathman won't see it, because he's a fool, and only just misses being weak in his head. But I see it clear enough, and the ugly truth of the man is that for five thousand pounds he was content to let his children come into the world bastards. That's what he did, and I'm not going to pretend I care for him or shall ever respect his memory."

"It'll never come out, however," said Phyllis.

"I'm sure I hope it won't — not out of my mouth, anyway. But still it is so, and all the money he may have left behind him won't make me feel different."

"We shall be rich, I hope, anyway," speculated Phyllis.

"I suppose we shall; and that's the only bright thing about it."

"'Twill be funny not walking first behind the coffin, and not sitting in the mourners' pew after for the Sunday sermon; and we knowing all the time that's where we ought to be," said the younger; but Cora exploded the theory.

"Not at all. We've no right there — not the right of the most distant cousin twenty times removed. Mother was his mistress, and she daren't use the word 'husband' even to us, though I've seen her mouth itching to do it. 'Tis always 'your dear father.' She can't put on a widow's streamers, though it's in her heart to. She'll have to balance her black

pretty cautious, I can tell you, if she don't want the people to be staring."

"Surely it must all come out if he leaves his money to us."

"He'll do it clever," said Cora bitterly. "With all his faults he was clever enough. He didn't hide this — so clever as a lapwing hides her nest — for near thirty years, to let it come out the minute he was dead."

"If I was engaged to be married, like what you are, I shouldn't be so nervous," said Phyllis.

"As to that, 'twas as well for me that it fell out now and not later. It may mean a bigger establishment after all; and even a bigger wedding, if I put it off till spring."

"My word, what'll Ned say?"

But Ned's view did not enter as a serious factor into Cora's.

"He's all right," she answered. "If I'm content, so's he."

Storm heralded the funeral day, and dawn blinked red-eyed from much weeping. It was hoped that further torrents might hold off until after the ceremony, and happily they did so, though intermittent rain fell and the wind stormed roughly out of a sad-coloured south.

"'Blessed be the carpse that the rain rains on,'" said Joe Voysey in muffled accents to Jack Head.

They were walking under the coffin, and bore it, with the assistance of six other men, to the grave.

"Ban't so blessed for them that's alive, however," answered Jack. "The mourners will be lashed out of their skins by the look of it. Death's never so busy as at a funeral."

A purple pall spread over the coffin, and while

humble men carried the weight of Nathan Baskerville's dust, others of greater repute stood at the corners of the coverlet. They included Mr. Luscombe of Trowlesworthy, Timothy Waite of Coldstone Farm, Heathman Lintern as representing Undershaugh, one Mr. Popham from Cornwood, Nathan's lawyer, and others.

Humphrey Baskerville walked beside the coffin as chief mourner, and Hester Baskerville, on her son Ned's arm, followed him with the rest of the family, save Nathan's namesake, who was at sea. Other relations came after them, with Nicholas Bassett, Polly's husband, and Milly, the wife of Rupert. Cora and her mother and her sister were next in the long procession, and half a dozen private carriages stood together beneath the churchyard wall to support a convention and indicate the respect that their owners entertained towards the dead.

Flowers covered the pall and stood piled beside the grave. Crosses, wreaths, and various trophies were here, together with many little humble bunches from cottage gardens, and not a few mere gleanings from the hedgerow of scarlet and crimson berries, or the last autumnal splendour of beech and briar. The air was heavy with emotion, and many wept. A congregational minister conducted the service, and the vicar helped him. After the body had sunk to earth and the rite was nearly accomplished, the chief mourners took their last look upon the lid, according to custom. Leaves whirled in the air, and the branches overhead made a mighty sigh and swough in the brief silence. Underfoot was trampled mire and reeking grass. A pushing child slipped in the clay at the grave-mouth, and nearly fell in. She was dragged back by Thomas Gollop and despatched weeping to the rear.

Humphrey Baskerville came almost the last to look

into the grave, and as others had fallen away from it when he did so, he assumed a momentary prominence. His small, bent, and sombre shape appeared alone at the edge of the cleft-in earth, with flowers piled about his knees. Then suddenly, ominously, cutting its way through the full diapason of the storm-sounds on trees and tower, there crept a different utterance. The wind shouted deep and loud; but this noise was thin and harsh — a hissing, a sharp, shrill sibilation that gained volume presently and spread epidemic into the crowded ranks of the collected men. They were mostly the young who permitted themselves this attack, but not a few of their elders joined with them. The sounds deepened; a groan or two threaded the hisses. Then Baskerville, from his abstraction, awakened to the terrific fact that here, beside his brother's grave, in the eyes of all men, a demonstration had broken out against him. Hands were pointed, even fists were shaken.

He could not immediately understand; he looked helplessly into certain angry faces, and then shrank back from the grave to where his relations stood.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked Ned; but the young man turned and pretended not to hear him. Then the truth came hurtling like a missile. Voices shouted at him the words 'murderer' and 'brother-killer.'

The fire that lights a mob into one blaze was afoot, and leaping from heart to head. Many for a jest bellowed these insults at him, and thought it good for once to bate so unpopular a creature. A few in honest and righteous rage cried out their wrath. Of such were those who stoned the martyrs to serve their jealous gods. More stones than one now actually did fly, and Humphrey was struck upon the arm. A counter display of feeling ran like a wave against the enemies

of the man, and induced a shock in the crowd. Masterman and others laboured to still the gathering storm; women's voices clacked against the gruffer noise of the men. Voysey, with admirable presence of mind, drew some boards over the dead in his grave, that no quick spirit might suddenly fall upon him.

The disturbance ended as swiftly as it had begun, for Humphrey Baskerville made a bolt, dashed through the crowd, descended the churchyard steps, and reached the street. A dozen hastened to follow, but Jack Head, Lintern, Waite, Mr. Masterman, and Ben North, the policeman, resisted the rioters, and kept them within the churchyard walls as far as possible. Jack hit so hard that soon he was involved in a battle against odds on his own account.

Meantime, with a clod or two whizzing past his head, Humphrey reached the street corner and hastened round it. Here was silence and peace. He stopped, and his brain grew dizzy. Such exertion he had not made for many years. He heard the noise of men and hastened on. A chaos of ideas choked his mind and dammed all play of coherent thought. He had heard a rumour that the thing he had done for his brother was regarded differently by different men, but he knew not that so many were incensed and enraged. The shock of the discovery disarmed him now and left him frantic. He looked forward, and believed that his last hope of reconciliation with humanity was dead. He envied the eternal peace of his brother as he struggled on against the hill homeward.

Into the black and water-logged heart of Shaugh Moor he climbed presently, and from exhaustion and faintness fell there. He stopped upon the ground for a few moments; then lifted himself to his hands and knees; then sat down upon a stone and stared down into the theatre of this tragedy.

Overhead a sky as wild as his soul made huge and threatening preparations for the delayed tempest. Through the tangled skirts of the darkness westerly there strove and spread great passages of dazzling silver all tattered and torn and shredded out of the black and weltering clouds. For a moment in the midst of this radiance there opened a farewell weather-gleam, where the azure firmament was seen only to vanish instantly. Then the gloom gathered, and huddled up in ridges of purple and of lead. Aloft, from the skirt of the main cumulus, where it swept under the zenith, there hung, light as a veil, yet darker than the sky behind them, long, writhing tentacles, that twisted down and curled in sinister suspension, that waved and twined, and felt hither and thither horribly, like some aerial hydra seeking prey.

For a time these curtains of the rain swayed clear of earth; but their progress swept them against it, and they burst their vials upon the bosom of the Moor. The storm shrieked, exploded, emptied itself with howling rage out of the sudden darkness. Then the fury of these tenebrous moments passed; the hurricane sped onward, and the dim wet ray that followed struck down upon a heath whitened with ice for miles. A bitterness of cold and an ice-blink of unfamiliar radiance were thrown upwards from the crust of the hail; but soon it melted, and the waste, now running with a million rivulets, grew dark again.

The spectacle must have been impressive to any peaceful mind, but Baskerville saw nothing hyperbolic in the rage of wind and water. The storm cited by Nature was not more tremendous than that tornado now sweeping through his own soul.

END OF SECOND BOOK

Book III

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

HUMPHREY BASKERVILLE continued to stalk the stage of life like a lonely ghost, and still obscured from all men and women the secrets of his nature, and the fierce interest of his heart in matters human. The things that he most wished to display he deliberately concealed, as a shy child who makes a toy, and longs to show it, but dares not, yet grows warm to the roots of his being if the treasure is found and applauded. Behind doubts, suspicions and jealousies he hid himself; his tongue was rough; his utterances at the outrage put upon him before the people by his brother's grave were bitter and even coarse. Nor did it abate his concern to know that the hostile explosion was as much simulated as genuine, as much mischievous as meant. It drove him in upon himself; it poisoned his opinion of human wisdom; and for a time he moved through darkest night.

Yet this transcendent gloom preceded a dawn; the crisis of his unquiet days approached; and, from the death of Nathan onward, life changed gradually for the man, and opened into a way that until now had been concealed from his scrutiny.

There chanced an hour when Humphrey Baskerville rode upon his pony under the high ground above Cornwood. He came by appointment to meet his dead brother's lawyer, and accident had postponed the

interview for some weeks. The solicitor desired to see him. There were strange rumours in the air, and it was declared that a very surprising and unexpected condition of things had appeared upon the publican's passing.

Humphrey refused to hear even his own relations upon the matter, for he held Nathan's estate no concern of his; but at the urgent entreaties of Mr. Popham, the master of Hawk House now rode to see him. He had, however, already made it clear that he was to be considered in no way responsible for his brother's obligations, and felt unprepared to offer advice or engage himself in any particular.

He passed across the shoulder of Pen Beacon, through a wild world of dun-coloured hills, streaked with flitting radiance, and clouded in billowy moisture driven before a great wind. The sky was lowering, and a gale from the Atlantic swept with tremendous power along; but the nature of the scene it struck was such that little evidence of the force displayed could appear to the beholder. Stone and steep and sodden waste stared blindly at the pressure and flinched not. It remained for wandering beast or man to bend before it and reveal its might. On the pelt of the sheep and cattle, or against the figure of a wanderer, its buffet was manifest; and, in the sky, the fierce breath of it herded the clouds into flocks, that sped and spread and gathered again too swiftly for the telling. They broke in billows of sudden light; they massed into darkness and hid the earth beneath them; then again they parted, and, like a ragged flag above a broken army, the clean blue unfurled.

Over this majestic desolation suddenly there shot forth a great company of rooks, and the wind drove them before it — whirling and wheeling and tumbling in giddy dives, only to mount again. A joyous spirit

clearly dominated the feathered people. They circled and cried aloud in merry exultation of the air. They swooped and soared, rushed this way and that on slanting pinions, played together and revelled in the immense force that drove them like projectiles in a wild throng before it. Even to these aerial things such speed was strange. They seemed to comment in their language upon this new experience. Then the instinct unfathomed that makes vast companies of living creatures wheel and warp together in mysterious and perfect unison, inspired them. They turned simultaneously, ascended and set their course against the wind. But they could make no headway now, and, in a cloud, they were blown together, discomforted, beaten to leeward. Whereupon they descended swiftly to the level of the ground, and, flying low, plodded together back whence they had come. At a yard or two above earth's surface they steadily flapped along, cheated the wind, and for a few moments flashed a reflected light over the Moor with their innumerable shining black bodies and pinions outspread. At a hedge they rose only to dip again, and here Humphrey, who drew up to watch them, marked how they worked in the teeth of the gale, and was near enough to see their great grey bills, their anxious, glittering eyes, and their hurtling feathers blown awry as they breasted the hedge, fought over, and dipped again.

"'Tis the same as life," he reflected. "Go aloft and strive for high opinions, and the wind of doubt blows you before it like a leaf. Up there you can travel with the storm, not against it. If you want to go t'other way, you've got to feel along close to earth seemingly — to earth and the manners of earth and the folk of the earth. And hard work at that; but better than driving along all alone."

He derived some consolation from this inchoate

thought, and suspected a moral; but the simile broke down. His mind returned to Mr. Popham presently, and, taking leave of the Moor, he descended and arrived at the lawyer's house upon the appointed hour.

The things that he heard, though he was prepared for some such recital, astounded him by their far-reaching gravity. The fact was of a familiar character; but it came with the acidulated sting of novelty to those involved. An uproar, of which Humphrey in his isolation had heard but the dim echo, already rioted through Shaugh Prior, and far beyond it.

"I'll give you a sketch of the situation," said the man of business. "And I will then submit my own theory of it—not that any theory can alter the exceedingly unpleasant facts. It belongs merely to the moral side of the situation, and may help a little to condone our poor friend's conduct. In a word, I do not believe he was responsible."

"Begin at the other end," answered Humphrey. "Whether he was responsible or not won't help us now. And it won't prevent honest men spurning his grave, I fancy."

Mr. Popham collected his papers and read a long and dismal statement. His client had always kept his affairs closely to himself, and such was the universal trust and confidence that none ever pressed him to do otherwise. He had been given a free hand in the administration of considerable sums; he had invested where he pleased, and for many years had enjoyed the best of good fortune, despite the hazardous character of the securities he affected.

"No man was ever cursed with such an incurable gift of hope," explained the lawyer. "All along the line you'll find the same sanguine and unjustifiable methods exhibited. The rate per cent was all he cared about. His custom was to pay everybody four and

a half, and keep the balance. But when companies came to grief nobody heard anything about it; he went on paying the interest, and, no doubt, went on hoping to make good the capital. This, however, he seldom appears to have done. There are about forty small people who deposited their savings with him, and there is nothing for any of them but valueless paper. He was bankrupt a dozen times over, and the thing he'd evidently pinned his last hope to—a big South American silver mine—is going the way of the others. Had it come off, the position might have been retrieved; but it is not coming off. He put five thousand pounds into it—not his own money—and hoped, I suppose, to make thirty thousand. It was his last flutter."

"Where did he get the money?"

"By mortgaging Cadworthy and by using a good deal of his late brother's capital. I mean the estate of Mr. Vivian Baskerville."

"He's a fraudulent trustee, then?"

"He is. He had already mortgaged all his own property. He was in a very tight place about the time of Mr. Vivian's death, and the money he had to handle then carried him on."

"What did he do with his own money? How did he spend that?"

"We shall never know, unless somebody comes forward and tells us. I trace the usual expenditures of a publican and other expenses. He always kept a good horse or two, and he rode to hounds until latterly, and subscribed to several hunts. He was foolishly generous at all times. I see that he gave away large sums anonymously—but unfortunately they were not his own. There is no doubt that his judgment failed completely of late years. He was so accustomed to success that he had no experience of failure, and when inevitable failures came, they found him quite unprepared with

any reserves against them. To stem the tide he gambled, and when his speculations miscarried, he waded still more deeply. He was engaged in borrowing a large sum of money just before his final illness. Indeed, he came to me for it, for he kept me quite in the dark concerning existing mortgages on his property. But he forgot I should want the title-deeds. He was a devious man, but I shall always believe that he lacked moral understanding to know the terrible gravity of the things he did."

"How do we stand now?"

"The estate is from six thousand to seven thousand pounds to the bad."

"What is there against that?"

"The assets are practically nil. About forty pounds at the bank, and the furniture at 'The White Thorn' Inn. Of course, his largest creditor will be Mr. Ned Baskerville, of Cadworthy Farm. I want to say, by the way, that this state of things is quite as much of a surprise to me as to anybody. It is true that I have been his solicitor for twenty years, but my work was nominal. I had no knowledge whatever of his affairs. He never consulted me when in difficulties, or invited my opinion on any subject."

"What about the Linterns?"

"They have asked to stop at Undershaugh for the present. I fancy Mrs. Lintern was a close friend of your brother's. However, she is not communicative. The mortgagee in that case, of course, forecloses, and will, I think, be contented to let Mrs. Lintern stop where she is."

"There was no will?"

"I can find none."

"Yet I know very well he made one ten years ago. At least, he came to me once rather full of it."

"It is very likely that he destroyed it."

There was a silence; then Humphrey Baskerville asked a question.

"Well, what d'you want of me?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I leave that to you. You know how much or how little you regard this disaster as a personal one."

"It has nothing whatever to do with me. I never lent him a penny. He never asked me to do so."

"You don't recognise any obligation?"

"Absolutely not a shadow of any such thing."

"The family of which you are now head ——?"

"A sentimental lawyer!"

The other laughed.

"Not much room for sentimentality — at least, plenty of room, no doubt. Of course, if you don't consider ——"

He broke off, but his listener did not speak.

"It is to be understood I must not ask you to help me?"

"Not in any practical way — not with money — certainly not. For the rest, if as a man of business I can be of any service ——"

"For the sake of the family."

"The family is nothing to me — at least, the one hit hardest is nothing to me. He'll have to work for his living now. That's no hardship. It may be the best thing that's befallen him yet."

"Very true, indeed. Well, let us leave the main question open. The case has no very unusual features. Occasionally the world trusts a man to his grave, and then finds out, too late, that it was mistaken. It is extraordinary what a lot of people will trust a good heart, Mr. Baskerville. Trust, like hope, springs eternal in the human breast."

"Does it? I've never found much come my way. And I'm not strong in trust myself. I felt friendly to

Nathan, because he was my own flesh and blood; but trust him — no."

"He didn't confide in you?"

"Never."

Mr. Baskerville rose.

"I shall see my relations no doubt pretty soon. I fancy they'll pay me some visits. Well, why not? I'm lonely, and rolling in money — so they think. And — there's a woman that I rather expect to call upon me. In fact, I've bidden her to do so. Perhaps, if she don't, I'll call on her. For the present we can leave it. If there's no money, nobody can hope to be paid. We'll talk more on that later. Who's got Cadworthy?"

"Westcott of Cann Quarries. He lent the money on it."

"What the devil does he want with it?" asked Mr. Baskerville.

"That I can't tell you. Probably he doesn't want it. He's foreclosed, of course. It was only out of friendship and regard for Mr. Nathan that he lent so much money on the place. He tells me that your brother explained to him that it was for a year or so to help Ned; and out of respect for the family he gladly obliged."

"Didn't know Westcott was so rich."

"You never know who's got the money in these parts. But 'tis safe to bet that it isn't the man who spends most. There's Mr. Timothy Waite, too, he lent Nathan a thousand, six months ago. Some cock-and-bull story your poor brother told him, and of course, for such a man, he gladly obliged. Each that he raised money from thought he was the only one asked, of course."

"He was a rogue, and the worst sort of rogue — a chapel-going, preaching, generous-handed, warm-hearted rogue. Such men are the thieves of virtue. 'Tis an infamous story."

The lawyer stared, and Humphrey continued.

"Such men are robbers, I tell you — robbers of more than money and widows' houses. They are always seeming honest, and never being so. They run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. They get the benefit of being rogues, and the credit of honest men. They are imitation good men, and at heart know not the meaning of real goodness. They have the name of being generous and kind — they are neither. Look what this man has left behind him — blessings turned to curses. All a sham, and a lifelong theft of men's admiration and esteem — a theft; for he won it by false pretences and lived a lie."

"He is dead, however."

"Yes, he is dead; and I suppose you are the sort who like to palter with facts and never speak ill of the dead. Why should we not tell the truth about those who are gone? Does it hurt them to say it? No; but it may do the living some good to say it. If living knaves see us condoning and forgiving dead ones, will they turn from their knavery any the quicker? We're a slack-twisted, sentimental generation. Justice is the last thing thought of. It's so easy to be merciful to people who have sinned against somebody else. But mercy's slow poison, if you ask me. It rots the very roots of justice."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"The first of Christian virtues, Mr. Baskerville, we must remember that. But argument won't alter facts. You don't see your way to do anything definite, so there's an end of it. Of course, there is no shadow of obligation."

"You're right. I'll visit you again presently. Meantime you might let me have a copy of the claims. I'm interested in knowing how many fools trusted my dead brother with their money. I should like to

know what manner of man and woman put their savings into another man's pocket without security. It seems contrary to human nature."

"There's no objection at all. They are all clamouring for their money. And if the South American silver mine had done all that was hoped, not only would they have had their cash, but your brother must have saved his own situation, cleared his responsibilities, and died solvent."

"'If.' There's generally a rather big 'if' with a South American anything, I believe."

They parted, and Humphrey Baskerville rode home again. Upon the way he deeply pondered all the things that he had heard, and not until he was back at Hawk House did distraction from these thoughts come. Then he found that a woman waited to see him. It was Priscilla Lintern, who had called at his invitation; and now he remembered that he had asked her, and half regretted the act.

CHAPTER II

MRS. LINTERN arrived by appointment, for while one instinct of his nature pressed Humphrey to evade this problem and take no hand in the solution, another and more instant impulse acted in opposition.

He surveyed the sweep of events as they struck at those involved in Nathan's ruin and death; and acting upon reasons now to be divulged, he sent first for the mistress of Undershaugh; because in his judgment her right to consideration was paramount.

Even in the act of summoning her, he told himself that these claims were no business of his to investigate; and that he was a fool to meddle. He repudiated responsibility at one breath, and deliberately assumed it with the next. His own motives he did not pause to examine.

Introspection irritated him and he turned from his conflicting ideas with impatience. In himself he only saw a very ill-balanced, imprudent, and impertinent person; yet he proceeded.

Now came Mrs. Lintern to know what he would have, and he saw her with an emotion of hearty regret that he had invited her.

In answer to his first question she assured him that she and her children were well.

"I'm afraid putting off the wedding has annoyed your nephew a good bit," she said; "but Cora felt that it was better; and so did I."

"Why did you think so?"

"Well, your brother held it so much to heart; and he was Ned's uncle. We could only have made a very

quiet business of it in decency; and Cora felt 'twould be sad to marry under the cloud of death."

"Half the sorrow in the world is wasted on what can't be helped. It's folly to mourn what's beyond altering—just as great folly as to mourn the past. Surely you know that?"

"No doubt; but who can help it that's made on a human pattern?"

"The world would be a cheerful place if none wept for what can't be altered. There was nothing in reason to stand between us and the wedding. 'Twas my brother's last wish, for that matter."

She did not answer and a silence fell between them. He was determined that she should break it, and at length she did so.

"Your brother was very fond of Cora. Of course, we at Undershaugh miss him a very great deal."

"You would—naturally."

"At present the idea is that they get married in spring; and that won't be none too soon, for everything's altered now. They'll have to sell half they bought, and get rid of their fine house and their horses, and much else. This business has entirely altered the future for them, poor things."

"Utterly, of course. 'Twill have to be real love to stand this pinch. Better they wait a bit and see how they feel about it. They may change their minds. Both are pretty good at that."

She sighed.

"They understand each other, I believe. But Ned won't change, whatever Cora does. He's wrapped up heart and soul in her."

"He'll have to seek work now."

"Yes; he is doing so."

"The one thing he's never looked for. Harder to find work than foxes."

"He's not good for much."

"You say that of your future son-in-law?"

"Truth's truth. A harmless and useless man. I can't for the life of me think what he'll find to do."

"Nathan would have given him a job — eh? How wonderful he was at finding work for people. And what does Cora think of it all?"

"She's a very secret girl."

"And Heathman?"

"Heathman be going to make my home for me — somewhere. 'Tisn't decided where we go."

"You leave Undershaugh, then?"

"Yes."

"Nathan wouldn't have wished that, I'm sure."

"We were to have stopped, but the new owner wants to raise the rent to nearly as much again."

"What used you to pay?"

She hesitated. Like many people whose position has forced them into the telling of countless lies, she was still tender of truth in trifles.

"No matter," he said. "I can guess the figure very easily, and nought's the shape of it."

A sinister foreboding flashed through her mind. It seemed impossible to suppose such an innuendo innocent. Miss Gollop had said many offensive things concerning her after Nathan's death; but few had believed them, and still fewer shown the least interest in the subject. It was absurd to suppose that Humphrey Baskerville would trouble his head with such a rumour.

"Your brother was generous to all," she answered.

"Why, he was. And if charity shouldn't begin at home, where should it?"

"He was very generous to all," she repeated.

"I've been seeing Mr. Popham to-day."

"He's a true kind man, and wishful to do what he can. The rent asked now for Undershaugh is too

high, even in the good state we've made it. So I've got to leave."

"'Twill be a wrench."

"Yes, indeed."

"But not such a bad one as his death?"

"That's true."

He probed her.

"Never to see him come down your path with his bustling gait; never to hear the laughter of the man. You held his hand when he went out of life. He loved you — 'twas the master passion of him."

A flush of colour leapt and spread over her face. She gasped but said nothing.

"A cruel thing that he left you as he did."

"What was I?" she began, alert and ready to fight at once and crush this suspicion. "What are you saying? We were nothing——"

He held up his hand.

"A fool's trick — a lifelong fool's trick to hide it — a cruel, witless thing — a wrong against generations unborn — scandalous — infamous — beyond belief in a sane man."

"I don't understand you. God's my——"

"Hush — hush! I'm not an enemy. You needn't put out your claws; you needn't lie to me. You needn't break oaths to me. It's a secret still; but I know it — only me. You were his mistress, Priscilla Lintern — his mistress and the mother of his children."

"He never told you that."

"Not he."

"Who did tell you?"

"Cora told me."

"She'd rather have——"

"She told me — not in words; but every other way. I knew it the hour she came to see me, after she was

engaged to marry my son. She strokes her chin like Nat stroked his beard. Have you marked that? She thinks just like Nat thought in a lot of ways, though she's not got his heart. She's not near so silly as he was. Her voice was the echo to his as soon as I got the clue. Her eyes were his again. She handles her knife and fork just like he was wont to do it; she sets her head o' one side to listen to anybody in the way he did. There's birds do it too — when they gather worms out of the grass. And from that I took to marking t'others. Your second girl be more like you; but Heathman will be nearer his father every day as he gets older. If he growed a beard, he'd be nearer him now. Wait and watch. And he's got his heart. Don't speak till you hear more. From finding out that much, I sounded Nathan himself. Little he guessed it, but what I didn't know, I soon learned from him. Cora was the apple of his eye. She could do no wrong. 'Twas Vivian and Ned over again. He spoke of you very guarded, but I knew what was behind. It came out when he was dying, and he was too far gone to hide it. And let me say this: I'll never forgive him for doing such a wicked thing — never. God may; but I won't. I wouldn't forgive myself if I forgave him. But you — you — dull man as I am, I can see a bit of what your life was."

"A better life — a more precious life than mine no woman ever lived."

He took a deep breath.

Here she tacitly confessed to all that he had declared. She did not even confirm it in words, but granted it and proceeded with the argument. And yet his whole theory had been built upon presumption. If she had denied the truth, he possessed no shadow of power to prove it.

"If ever I pitied anybody, I pity you; and I admire you in a sort of left-handed way. You're a very uncommon creature to have hid it in the face of such a village as Shaugh Prior."

"What I am he made me. He was a man in ten thousand."

"I hope he was. Leave him. Let me say this afore we get on. I don't judge you and, God knows it, I'm alive to this thing from your point of view. You loved him well enough even for that. But there's no will. He had nothing to leave; therefore — unless you've saved money during his lifetime ——?"

"I don't want you to have anything to do with my affairs, Mr. Baskerville."

"As you please. But there are your children to be considered. Now it may very much surprise you to know that I have thought a lot about them. Should you say, speaking as an outsider, that I'm under any obligation to serve them?"

The sudden and most unexpected question again startled the blood from Mrs. Lintern's heart.

"What a terrible curious man you are! What a question to ask me!" she said.

"Answer it, however — as if you wasn't interested in it."

"No," she declared presently. "None can say that they are anything to do with you. You wasn't your brother's keeper. They be no kin of yours in law or justice."

"In law — no. In justice they are of my blood. Not that that's anything. You're right. They are nought to me. And you are less than nought. But ——" He stopped.

"Why have you told me that you have found this out?" she asked. "What good can come of it? You'll admit at least 'tis a sacred secret, and you've

no right whatever to breathe it to a living soul? You won't deny that?"

"There again — there's such a lot of sides to it. You might argue for and against. Justice is terrible difficult. Suppose, for instance, that I held, like Jack Head holds and many such, that 'tis a very improper thing and a treachery to the unborn to let first cousins mate — suppose I held to that? Ought I to sit by and let Cora marry Ned? Now there's a nice question for an honest man."

"You were going to let Cora marry your own son."

"I don't know so much about that. They were engaged to each other before I found it out, and then, as she soon flung him over, there was no need for me to speak. Now, the question is, shall I let these two of the same blood breed and maybe bring feebler things than themselves into the world?"

"This is all too deep for me. One thing I know, and that is you can say nought. You've come to the truth, by the terrible, wonderful brains in your head; but you've no right to make it known."

"You're ashamed of it?"

She looked at him almost with contempt.

"You can ask that and know me, even so little as you do? God's my judge that I'd shout it out from the top of the church tower to-morrow; I'd be proud for the world to know; and so much the louder I'd sing it because he's gone down to his grave unloved and in darkness. It would make life worth living to me, even now, if I could open my mouth and fight for him against the world. Not a good word do I hear now — all curse him — all forget the other side of him — all forget how his heart went out to the sorrowful and sad. . . . But there — what's the use of talking? He don't want me to fight for him."

"If you feel that, why don't you stand up before the people and tell 'em?"

"There's my children."

"Be they more to you than he was?"

"No; but they are next."

"I hate deceit. Who'll think the worse of them?"

"Who won't?"

"None that are worth considering."

"You know very little about the world, for all that you are deep as the dark and can find out things hidden. What about my darters? No, it wouldn't be a fair thing to let it out."

"I hold it very important."

"It shan't be, I tell you. You can't do it; you never would."

"You're right. I never would. But that's not to say I don't wish it to come out. For them, mind you, I speak. I leave you out now. I put you first and you say you'd like it known. So I go on to them, and I tell you that for their peace of mind and well-being in the future, 'tis better a thousand times they should start open and fair, without the need of this lie between them and the world."

"I don't agree with that. When the truth was told them on his deathbed, 'twas settled it should never go no further."

"Wait and think a moment before you decide. What has it been to you to hide the truth all your life?"

"A necessity. I soon grew used to it. Nobody was hurt by it. And Nathan kept his money."

"Don't fool yourself to think that none was hurt by it. Everybody was hurt by it. A prosperous lie be like a prosperous thistle: it never yet flourished without ripening seed and increasing its own poisonous stock a thousandfold. The world's full of that thistle-down. Your children know the truth themselves;

therefore I say it should come out. They've no right to stand between you and the thing you want to do. I'll wager Heathman don't care—it's only your daughters."

"More than that. Nathan would never have wished it known."

"No argument at all. He was soaked in crookedness and couldn't see straight for years afore he died."

"I won't have it and I won't argue about it."

"Well, your word's law. But you're wrong; and you'll live to know you're wrong. Now what are you going to do? We'll start as though I knew nought of this for the moment."

"I stop at Undershaugh till spring. I've got no money to name. We shall settle between ourselves—me and Heathman."

"I'll ——"

He stopped.

"No," he said; "I can't promise anything, come to think of it; and I can't commit myself. 'Tis folly to say, 'let the position be as though I didn't know the truth.' It can't be. I do know it, and I'm influenced by it. I'll do nothing at all for any of you unless this comes out. I say that, not because I don't care for my brother's children, but because I do care for them."

"I don't want you to do anything. I've got my son. I refuse absolutely to speak. Until my children are all of one mind about it, the thing must be hidden up—yes, hidden up for evermore. I won't argue the right or the wrong. 'Tis out of my hands, and so long as one of them says 'no,' I hold it my duty to keep silent. And, of course, 'tis yours also."

"Who knows what my duty would be if Ned was going to marry Cora? I'd sacrifice the unborn to you; but not to your daughter and my nephew.

There have been enough tongues to curse that worthless pair already. You don't want their own children to do the same in the time to come? But perhaps I know as much about Cora as you do about Ned. Wait and see if she changes her mind, since he has lost his fortune."

Priscilla rose.

"I will go now," she said. "Of course, you can't guess how this looks to a woman — especially to me of all women. To find that you knew — and no doubt you thought I'd come here and drop dead afore you of shame."

"No, I didn't. If you'd been that sort, I shouldn't have plumped it out so straight. You are a brave creature, and must always have been so. Well, I won't deny you the name of wife in secret — if you like to claim it."

She was moved and thanked him. Satisfaction rather than concern dominated her mind as she returned homeward. She felt glad that Nathan's brother knew, and no shadow of fear dimmed her satisfaction; for she was positive that, despite any declared doubts, he would never make the truth public.

Her own attitude was even as she had described it. She would have joyed to declare her close companionship, if only to stop the tongues of those who hesitated not to vilify the dead before her.

Eliza Gollop had told many stories concerning Mrs. Lintern's attendance in the sick room; but few were interested in them or smelt a scandal. They never identified Priscilla with the vanished innkeeper; they did not scruple to censure Nathan before her and heap obloquy on his fallen head.

Often with heart and soul she longed to fight for him; often she had some ado to hide her impotent anger; but a lifetime of dissimulation had skilled

her in the art of self-control. She listened and looked upon the angry man or woman; she even acquiesced in the abuse by silence. Seldom did she defend the dead man, excepting in secret against her daughters.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Cora Lintern returned home she brought with her a resolution. Her intentions were calculated to cause pain, and she carried them so much the quicker to execution, that the thing might be done and the blow struck as swiftly as possible. She revealed her plan to none, and only made it public when he who was chiefly involved had learned it.

Ned Baskerville called to see Cora, who had been stopping with friends; and when she had spoken upon general subjects, she made him come out with her to the wintry side of West Down, and there imparted her wintry news.

"Have you found anything to do?" was Cora's first question, and he answered that he had not.

"People don't understand me," he said. "Here is Rupert talking about labourer's work, as if it was a perfectly decent suggestion to make. My farm's gone, and he seems to think I might offer to stop there under somebody, like he has himself."

"You want something better."

"Why, of course. I might get a clerkship or some such thing, I should think. A man who has lived my life can't go and dig potatoes. But the difficulty is to get work like that away from towns. I can't be expected to live in a town, and I won't."

"Mr. Tim Waite is a friend of the people I've been stopping with," she said. "He's rich and all that. I believe he might find——"

"Thank you for nothing, Cora. I'm hardly likely to trouble him, am I?"

"Not much use talking like that."

"I'll take patronage, if I must, because beggars can't be choosers; but I'll not take it from my inferiors."

"'Inferiors'! That's a funny word for you to use. How is Timothy Waite your inferior? I don't see it."

"Don't you?" he answered, getting red. "Then you ought to see it. Damn it all, Cora, you're so cold-blooded where I'm concerned. And yet you're supposed to love me and want to marry me."

"I'm not a fool, and if 'tis cold-blooded to have a bit of common-sense, then I'm cold-blooded. Though I'm a bit tired of hearing you fling the word in my face. Timothy Waite always was as good a man as you; and why not?"

"I should call him a mean, money-grubbing sort of chap myself — close-fisted too. He's not a sportsman, anyway. You can't deny that."

"Not much good being generous, if you've got nought to be generous with. And mean he is not. He lent money to your uncle, and never pushed the claim half as hard as many smaller men. I know him a long sight better than you do. And, if you've got any sense left, you'll go to him and ask him if he can help you to find a job. I'm only thinking of you — not myself. I can go into a hat shop any day; but you — you can't do anything. What are you good for? For that matter you don't seem to be able to get a chance to show what you are good for. All your swell hunting friends are worth just what I said they were worth. Now you're down on your luck, they look t'other way."

He began to grow angry.

"You're the fair-weather sort too, then? One here and there has hinted to me that you were — your brother

always said it. But never, never would I stand it from any of them. And now I see that it is so."

"No need to call names. The case is altered since Nathan Baskerville ruined you, and I'm not the sentimental kind to pretend different. As we're on this now, we'd better go through with it. You want to marry me and I wanted to marry you; but we can't live on air, I believe. I can't, anyway. It's a very simple question. You wish to marry me so soon as I please; but what do you mean to keep me on? I've got nothing — you know that; and you've got less than nothing, for there's the rent of the house we were to have lived in."

"I've let the house and I am looking round. I'm open to any reasonable offer."

"What nonsense you talk! Who are you that people should make you offers? What can you do? I ask you that again."

"By God! And you're supposed to love me!"

"When poverty comes in at the door — you know the rest. I'm not a heroine of a story-book. All very well for you; but what about me? You can't afford to marry, and I can't afford not to; so there it stands. There's only one thing in the world — only one thing — that you can be trusted to earn money at, and that's teaching people to ride horses. And that you won't do. I've thought it out, and you needn't swear and curse; because it's the truth."

"Damn it all ——"

"No good raging. You're selfish, and you never think of me working my fingers to the bone and, very likely, not knowing where to look for a meal. You only want me — not my happiness and prosperity. That's not love. If you loved me, you would have come long since and released me from this engagement, and saved me the pain of all this talk. Nobody ever

thinks of me and my future and my anxieties. I've only got my face and — and — you say 'damn' and I'll say it too. Damn — damn — damn — that's thrice for your once; and I hate you thrice as much as you hate me, and I've thrice the reason to. I hate you for being so selfish; and 'tis no good ever you saying you care about me again, because you never did — not really. You couldn't — else you wouldn't have put yourself first always."

He started, quite reduced to silence by this assault. She struck him dumb, but his look infuriated her.

"You won't make me draw back, so you needn't think it," she cried. "I'm not ashamed of a word I've said. 'Tis you ought to be ashamed. And I'm not sorry for you neither, for you've never once been sorry for me. After the crash, not one word of trouble for my loss and my disappointment did you utter — 'twas only whining about your horses, and the house at Plympton, and all the rest of it. Vain cursing of the man in his grave; when you ought to have cursed yourself for letting him have the power to do what he did. I'd have stuck to you, money or no money, if you'd been a different man — I swear that. I'd have taken you and set to work — as I shall now, single-handed — but how can any decent girl with a proper conceit of herself sink herself to your level and become your drudge? Am I to work for us both? Are you going to live on the money I make out of women's bonnets?"

"No!" he answered. "Don't think that. I'm dull, I know, and slow-witted. Such a fool was I that I never believed anything bad of a woman, or ever thought an unkind thought of anything in petticoats. But you use very straight English always, and you make your meaning perfectly clear. I know it won't be easy for me to get the work I want. I may

be poor for a long time — perhaps always. I'll release you, Cora, if that's what you wish. No doubt I ought to have thought of it; but I'll swear I never did. I thought you loved me, and everything else was small by comparison. If anybody had said 'release her,' I'd have told him that he didn't know what love of woman meant — or a woman's love of man. But you can be free and welcome, and put the fault on my shoulders. They can bear it. Go to Timothy. He's always wanted you."

"You needn't be coarse. I'm sick and tired of all you men. You don't know what love means — none of you. And since you say I'm to go, I'll go. And I'll find peace somewhere, somehow; but not with none of you."

He laughed savagely.

"You've ruined me — that's what you've done. Meat and drink to you, I'll wager! Ruined me worse than ever my uncle did. I could have stood up against that. I did. I'd pretty well got over the pinch of it. Though 'twas far more to me than anybody, I took it better than anybody, and my own mother will tell you so. But why? Because I thought I'd got you safe enough and nothing else mattered. I never thought this misfortune meant that you'd give me the slip. If any man had hinted such a thing, I'd have knocked his teeth down his throat. But I was wrong as usual."

"You gave me credit for being a fool as usual."

"Never that, Cora. I always knew very well you were clever, but I thought you were something more. You crafty things — all of you! And now — what? 'Twill be said I've jilted another girl — not that the only woman I ever honestly worshipped with all my heart have jilted me."

"No need to use ugly, silly words about it. All that will be said by sensible people is that we've both

seen reason and cut our coats according to our cloth. The people will only say you've got more wits than they thought. Let it be understood we were of the same mind, and so we both get a bit of credit for sense."

"Never!" he burst out passionately. "You're a hard-hearted, cruel devil. You know where the fault is and who's to blame. You think of nought but your own blasted comfort and pleasure, and you never cared no more for me than you cared for my cousin before me. But I'll not hang myself—be sure of that!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You might do worse, all the same," she said. "For you're only cumbering the earth that I can see."

Thereupon he swore wild oaths and rushed off and left her on the hillside alone.

When he was gone she went her own way, but not to Undershaugh. By deep lanes and field-paths familiar to her she took a long walk, and at the end of it found herself at Coldstone Farm, the abode of Mr. Timothy Waite. He was from home, and she asked for pen and paper that she might leave a note for him. Her communication was short, and when she had written it and sealed it with exceeding care, she set off again for home.

Anon Mr. Waite opened it and was much disappointed at the length. But Cora's matter atoned for this shortcoming.

"Have settled with N. B. Yours, C."

And elsewhere, while she retraced her way from Coldstone, the discarded lover came to a wild conclusion with himself. He steadied his steps, stood at the Moor edge in two minds, then turned and set off for Hawk House.

This blow had staggered him, had even awakened

him from the fatuous dream in which he passed his days. He had a vague idea that Humphrey might be glad to know of this broken engagement; that it might even put his uncle into a more amiable temper. Ned had been advised by Rupert to see Mr. Baskerville; but had declined to do so until the present time.

At Hawk House Mrs. Hacker met him and made no effort to hide astonishment.

"Wonders never cease, I'm sure! You, of all men! Master be on the Moor, riding somewheres, but if you want him, you can wait for him. He always comes in at dusk. How's your young woman?"

The man was in no mood for talk with Susan and cut her short.

"I'll wait, then," he said. "I'll wait in the garden."

He walked up and down amid the nut trees for an hour. Then Humphrey returned.

Tea was served for them in the kitchen; Susan went out and the way opened for Ned.

"You might be surprised to see me," he began; "but though I know you don't like me — natural enough too — still, I'm your eldest nephew, and I felt at a time like this you'd not refuse to let me speak to you."

"Speak, and welcome."

"Of course, all our lives are turned upside down by this terrible business."

"Not all. In these cases 'tis the drones, not the workers, that are hit hardest. If you've got wit enough to understand what you see under your eyes, you'll find that your brother Rupert, for instance, can go on with his life much as before; and scores of others — they've lost a bit of money — cheated out of it by my brother, the late Nathan Baskerville —

but it don't wreck them. 'Tis only such as you — accustomed all your life to idle and grow fat on other men's earnings — 'tis only such as you that are stranded by a thing like this. I suppose you want to get back into the hive — like t'other drones when the pinch of winter comes — and the world won't let you in?"

This uncompromising speech shook Ned and, under the circumstances, he felt that it was more than he could bear.

"If you knew what had happened to me to-day, you'd not speak so harsh, Uncle Humphrey," he answered. "I may tell you that I've been struck a very cruel blow in the quarter I least expected it. Cora Lintern's thrown me over."

"Cat-hearted little bitch," he said. "And you bleat about a 'cruel blow'! Why, you young fool, escape from her is the best piece of fortune that ever fell to your lot — or is ever likely to. And you ask me to be sorry for you! Fool's luck is always the best luck. You've had better fortune far than ever you deserved if she's quitted you."

"You can't look at it as I do; you can't see what my life must be without her."

"Eat your meat and don't babble that stuff."

Ned shook his head.

"Don't want nothing, thank you."

"Well, hear me," said Humphrey. "You sought me of your own free will, and so you may as well listen. You've come, because you think I can do you a turn — eh?"

"I'm down on my luck, and I thought perhaps that you — anyway, if you can help, or if you can't, you might advise me. I've looked very hard and very far for a bit of work such as I could do; and I've not found it."

"The work you can do won't be easily found.

Begin at the beginning. You're Godless — always have been."

"Let God alone and He'll let you alone — that's my experience," said Ned.

"Is it? Well, your experience don't reach far. You've come to the place where God's waiting for you now — waiting, and none too pleased at what you bring afore Him. You're a fool, and though we mourn for a wise man after he's dead, we mourn for a fool all the days of his life. D'you know where that comes from? Of course you don't."

"I can mend, I suppose? Anyway, I've got to be myself. Nobody can be different to their own character."

"Granted — you can't rise above your own character; but you can easily sink below it. That's what you have done, and your father helped you from the first."

"I won't hear you say nothing against him, Uncle Humphrey. Good or bad, he was all goodness to me."

"You think so, but you're wrong. Well, I'll leave him. But 'tis vain to judge you too hard when I remember your up-bringing."

"All the same, I will say this for myself: when you pull me to pieces, you'll find no wickedness in me worth mentioning. Whatever I may be, I've always behaved like a gentleman and a sportsman, and none will deny it," declared Ned.

"The biggest fool can be witty when it comes to excusing his own vices to his conscience," replied the old man. "Fox yourself with that rubbish, if you can, not me. To behave like a gentleman is to be a gentleman, I should think, and I understand the word very different from you. You're a selfish, worthless thing — a man that's reached near to thirty without putting

away his childish toys — a man that's grown to man's estate and stature without doing so much good in the world as my blind pony — nay, nor so much good as the worm that pulls the autumn leaves into the wet ground. And you pride yourself on being a gentleman! Better larn to be a man first and a gentleman afterwards."

"I've never had no occasion to work till now. Nobody ever asked me to; nobody ever wanted me to. It was natural that I shouldn't. A man can't help his character, and I can't help mine. I hate work and always shall."

"That's clear, then. And I can't help my character either. I hate idleness and always shall. Never have I given a loafer a helping hand, and never will I. A man ought to be like Providence and only help those who help themselves."

"But I mean to work; I need to work; I must work."

"Laziness is a cancer," said Mr. Baskerville. "'Tis just as much a cancer as the human ill we call by that name. And 'tis a modern thing. There's something rotten with the world where any man can live without earning the right to. When next you find yourself caddling about on the Moor wasting your time, take a look at the roundy-poundies — they circles of stones cast about on the hillsides and by the streams. My son Mark knew all about them. They were set up by men like ourselves who lived on the Moor very long ago. Life was real then. Nought but their own sweat stood between the old men and destruction. The first business of life was to keep life in them days. They hunted to live, not for pleasure. They hunted and were hunted. No time to be lazy then. Did they help beggars? Did they keep paupers? No; all had to toil for the common good; and if a man

didn't labour, he didn't eat. They had their work cut out for 'em to wring a bare living out of the earth and the creatures on it. No softness of mind or body then. No holidays and pleasurings and revels then. And I'd have it so again to-morrow, if I could. Work and eat; idle and starve — that's what I'd say to my fellow-creatures."

"I mean to work; I'm ready for work."

"All very well to say that now. You may be ready for work; but what sort of work is ready for you? What can you do? Can you break stones? There's a Cornish proverb hits you this minute: 'Them as can't scheme must lowster.' Your father was very fond of using it — to every lazy body but you. It means that if you haven't the wits to make a living with your brains, you must do it with your hands. It all comes back to work."

"I know it does. I keep on telling you I'm ready for it — any amount of it. But not breaking stones. I've got brains in my head, though I know you don't think so. I came to-day to know if you would give those brains a trial. I'm a free man now. Cora has flung me over, so there's no obligation anywhere. I'm free to stand up and show what I'm good for. I've sold my horses and given up hunting already. That's something."

"Something you couldn't help. How much did you get for that big bright bay?"

"Forty-five guineas."

"And gave?"

"Seventy. But, of course, I've not got enough capital all told to be much practical use in buying into anything. What I really want is five hundred pounds."

"A common want."

"And I thought perhaps that you — I thought of it as I came here to see you."

"And still you try to make out you're not a fool?"

"I can give interest and security."

"Yes — like your Uncle Nathan, perhaps. In a word, I'll not do anything. Not a farthing of money and not a hand of help. But ——"

He stopped as the younger man rose.

"I didn't ask for money; I only suggested a loan."

"I'll loan no loans to you or any man. But this I will do, because you are the head of our family now, and I don't want anybody to say I helped to cast you lower when you were down. This I will do: I'll double the money you earn."

"Double it!" exclaimed Ned.

"That's my word; and now the boot's on the other leg, and I'm the fool for my pains, no doubt. But understand me. 'Tis what you *earn*, not what you get. When you come to me and say, 'I've found a job, and I'm paid so much a week for doing it by an independent man,' then I'll double what he gives you. But let there be no hookemsnivey dealings, for I'll very soon find them out if you try it. Let it be figures, let it be horses, let it be clay, let it be stones by the road — I'll double what you earn for five years. By that time, maybe, you'll know what work means, and thank Heaven, that's taught you what it means. Go and find work — that's what you've got to do; go and find what you're worth in the open market of men. And you needn't thank me for what I offer. 'Twill be little enough, I promise you — as you'll find when you come to hear the money value of your earning powers."

"All the same I do thank you, and I thank you with all my heart," said Ned: "and perhaps you'll be a bit more astonished than you think for, Uncle Humphrey, when you find what I can do."

Then his nephew went away in doubt whether to be elated or cast down.

CHAPTER IV

AN elderly man called Abraham Elford became tenant of 'The White Thorn' after Baskerville's death. He lacked the charm of Nathan, and it was rumoured that the quality of his liquor by no means equalled that provided by the vanished master of the inn; but no choice offered of other drinking houses, and the new publican retained all former patronage.

One subject at this season proved rich enough to shut out all lesser matters from conversation, for the wide waves of concern set rolling when Nathan died had as yet by no means subsided. Each day for many days brought news of some fresh disaster to humble folk; and then came another sort of intelligence that gratified the few and angered the many.

Mr. Elford and certain of his customers, not directly interested, found the subject of Nathan's affairs exceedingly wearisome and often sought to turn talk into other channels; but not for long could they be said to succeed. Local politics and weather soon lost their power to hold the people; and those disasters spread by the late publican swiftly cropped up again to the exclusion of less pungent concerns.

A party of men was assembled at 'The White Thorn' near Christmas time, and they wrangled on over this well-trodden ground until Joe Voysey, who had not suffered, turned to the grey-headed host behind the bar and asked a question.

"Did this here fire fail afore you comed, Abraham?" he asked. "'Tis a well-known fact that 'The White

Thorn' hearth haven't been cold for a hundred year — peat always smouldering, or else blazing, upon it."

"Yes, and a thousand pities," answered the other. "At the time of Mr. Baskerville's death, of course, there was a terrible deal of running about and confusion. And the fire was forgot. I knowed the old saying and was very sorry to see it black out."

"What do it matter?" asked Jack Head. He was in a quarrelsome mood and bad company on the occasion. "These silly sayings and fancies are better forgot. Who's the wiser for a thing like that? Probably, when all's said, 'tis a lie. I dare say the fire went out scores of times when Nathan was here, and somebody just lit it again and said nought about it."

"That's wrong, Jack," declared Heathman Lintern, who was present. "Mr. Baskerville took a lot of care of the fire and felt very proud of it. A score of times I've heard him tell people about it, and that the fire had never been douted for more than a hundred years."

"One thing I know, that if there was such a place as hell, he'd soon meet with a fire as would last longer still," answered Head. "A fire that never will be douted. And right well he'd deserve it."

Thomas Gollop found himself in agreement with this ferocity.

"You're right there, and there is such a place — have no fear of that, though 'tis your way to scorn it. For my part I say that there couldn't be no justice without it. He devoured widows' houses and stole the bread of the poor — what worse can any man do?"

"A man can backbite the dead, and spit out his poison against them as never hurt him in word or deed," answered Heathman Lintern. "'Tis always your way to blackguard them that be out of earshot

and the power to answer; and the further a man be away, the louder you yelp. Faults or no faults, the likes of you wasn't worthy to wipe his shoes."

"You Linterns — well, I'll say nought," began Jack Head; but the subject was too attractive for him and he proceeded.

"If he left your mother any money, it's against the law, and you can tell her so. It wasn't his to leave, and if she got money from him in secret, it's my money — not hers — mine, and many other people's before it's hers. And if she was honest she'd give it back."

"You've lost your wits over this," answered Lintern, "and if you wasn't an old man, Jack, I'd hammer your face for mentioning my mother's name in such a way. She never had a penny by him, and the next man that says she did shall get a flea in his ear — old or young."

"Let it be a lesson to all sorts and conditions not to trust a Dissenter," said Gollop. "I've known pretty well what they're good for from the first moment they began to lift their heads in the land. They never were to be trusted, and never will be. And as for Nathan Baskerville, he was a double serpent, and I shall tell the truth out against him when and where I please; and why for not?"

"You don't know the meaning of truth," began Heathman; "no more don't that old cat, your sister."

"Better leave my sister alone, or 'twill be the worse for you," answered the parish clerk.

"I'll leave her alone when she leaves my mother alone, and not sooner. She a lying, foul-minded old baggage — not to be trusted in a respectable house — and if I was better to do, I'd have the law of her for the things she's said."

"You talk of the law," answered Jack. "You might just so well talk of the prophets. One's as rotten as t'other nowadays. The law's gone that weak that a man's savings can be taken out of his pocket by the first thief that comes along with an honest face; and him powerless. Five-and-thirty pound — that's what he had of mine, and the law looks on and does nought."

"Because there's nought for it to do," suggested Mr. Elford. "The law can't make bricks without straw ——"

"Just what it can do — when it's writing its own bills o' costs," answered Jack. "They'm damn clever at that; but let a rogue rob me of my savings and the law don't care a brass farthing. Why? Because I'm poor."

"Is there to be nought declared in the pound?" inquired an old man beside the fire. "He had eight, ten of mine, and I was hopeful us might get back a little, if 'twas only shillings."

"You'll see nothing of it, gaffer," declared Head. "There wasn't much more than enough to pay for the man's coffin. And the tears shed at his grave! I laugh when I think of all them gulls, and the parsons, with their long faces, thinking they was burying a good man and a burning light."

"A burning light now, if he wasn't afore," said Gollop, returning to his favourite theme.

"You're a mean cur at heart, Jack," burst out the dead man's son to Mr. Head. "With all your noise about justice and liberty and right and wrong, none on God's earth can show his teeth quicker and snarl worse if his own bone be took away. You knowed Nathan Baskerville — no one knowed him better than you. And well you know that with all his faults and foolish, generous way of playing with his money and other

people's — well, you know there was a big spirit in the man. He meant terrible kindly always. He didn't feather his own nest. For a hundred that curse him now, there's thousands that have blessed him in past years. But 'tis the curses come home to roost and foul a man's grave; the blessings be forgot."

The young man's eyes shone and his eloquence silenced the bar for a moment.

Jack Head stared.

"'Tis Mark Baskerville speaking," he said. "Even so he was used to talk! But I didn't know *you* was the soft sort too, Heathman. What was Nat to you, or you to Nat, that you can stand up for him and talk this nonsense in the face of facts? Where's my money? When you tell me that, I'll tell you——"

"Who knows whether you'm forgot after all, Jack?" interrupted Joe Voysey. "Everybody ban't ruined. There's a few here and there — especially the awful poor people — as have had their money made good."

"I know all about that," answered Head; "'tis that fool, the parson. Masterman have no more idea of justice than any other church minister, and he's just picked and chosen according to his own fancy, and made it up to this man and that man out of his own riches."

"To no man has he made it up," corrected Gollop. "'Tis only in the case of certain needy females that he've come forward. A widow here and there have been paid back in full. I made so bold as to ask Lawyer Popham about it; but he's not a very civil man, and he fobbed me off with a lawyer's answer that meant nought."

"'Tis well knowed to be Masterman, however," said Voysey.

"Yes; well knowed to us; but not to the general public. Some think it's the lawyer himself; but that's

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a wild saying. Last thing he'd do. He'll be out of pocket as it is."

At this juncture was presented the unusual spectacle of a woman in the bar of 'The White Thorn,' and Susan Hacker entered.

She was known to several present and men liked her. She understood the sex, and could give as good as she got. She expected little in the way of civility or sense from them, and she was seldom disappointed.

"Hullo!" cried Head. "Be you on the downward path then, Susan? 'Tis your old man driving you to drink without a doubt!"

The abundant woman pushed Jack out of her way and came to the counter.

"Don't you pay no heed to that there sauce-box," she said. "And him old enough and ugly enough to know better, you'd think. A drop of gin hot, please. I be finger-cold and I've got to speed home yet."

"How's 'the Hawk'?" asked Mr. Voysey. "We all thought when poor old Nathan was took off that he'd come forward with his money bags — knowing the man, didn't we, souls?"

This excellent jest awakened laughter till Susan stopped it. She took her drink to the fire, loosed a mangy little fur tippet from her great shoulders and warmed her feet alternately.

"A funny old fool you are, Joe — just funny enough to make other fools laugh. And why should Humphrey Baskerville waste his money on a lot of silly people? Which of you would come forward and help him if he was hard up?"

"I would," said Jack Head. "With my opinions I'd help any thrifty person let in by this dead man — if I could. But I was let in myself. And you're in the truth to call us fools, for so we were."

"It's reason, every way, that your master might

think of his brother's good name and right the wrong done by the man who was here afore me," declared Mr. Elford impartially.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Hacker. "Why do you say 'tis reason? If 'tis reason for him, 'tis just as much reason for every other man who can afford to mend it."

"That's what I say," argued Jack Head, but none agreed with him.

"Ban't our business, but 'tis Humphrey Baskerville's," declared the publican. "The dead man was his own brother and his only one. For the credit of the family he ought to come forward, and not leave the parson and other outsiders to do it."

"Because your brother does wrong, 'tis no business of yours to right the wrong," answered Mrs. Hacker. "Besides, 'tis well known that charity begins at home."

"And stops there," suggested Gollop. "No doubt at Hawk House, you and him be as snug as beetles in the tree bark, while other people don't know where to turn for a roof to cover 'em."

"They'd have poor speed if they was to turn to you, anyway," she said. "'Tis like your round-eyed, silly impudence to speak like that of a better man than ever you was or will be, or know how to be. He ban't bound to tell you where he spends his money, I believe; and if you was half as good a man — but there, what can you expect from a Gollop but a grunt? You'm a poor generation, you and your sister — God knows which is the worse."

"Bravo, Susan! Have another drop along o' me," cried Heathman Lintern, and she agreed to do so.

"What do you know and what don't you know?" asked Head presently. "Be your old party going to do anything or nothing?"

"I don't know. But this I do know, that all your wild tales down here about his money be silly lies.

We live hard enough, I can promise that, whatever you may think. If every man here spent his money so wise as Humphrey Baskerville, you wouldn't all be boozing in this bar now, but along with your lawful wives and families, helping the poor women to find a bit of pleasure in life. But I know you; you get a shipload of brats and leave their mothers to do all the horrid work of 'em, while you come in here every night like lords, and soak and twaddle and waste your money and put the world right, then go home not fit company for a dog——"

"Steady on — no preaching here — rule of the bar," said Mr. Voysey. "You think we're all blanks because you drew a blank, Susan. Yes, a blank you drew, though you might have had me in the early forties."

"You! I'd make a better man than you with a dozen pea-sticks," retorted Susan. "And I didn't draw a blank, I drawed Hacker, who'd be here now teaching you chaps to drink, if the Lord had spared him. You can't even drink now — so feeble have you growed. Hacker, with all his faults, was a fine man; and so's Humphrey Baskerville in his way."

"Talk on; but talk to the purpose, Susan. What have he done? That's the question. You ain't going to tell me he's done nought," suggested Mr. Head.

"I ain't going to tell you nothing at all, because I don't know nothing at all. He wouldn't ax me how to spend his money — nor you neither."

"Tell us who he's helping — if anybody," persisted the man. "How is it none haven't handed me back my money? You can mention — if you've got the pluck to do it — that I want my bit back so well as t'others; and mine be quite as much to me as Ned Baskerville's thousands was to him."

"Charity begins at home," repeated Susan, "and

I'll lay you my hat, though the fog's took the feather out of curl, that if he does anything, 'twill be for his own first. He's that sort, I believe."

"They people at Cadworthy?"

"Yes. Not that I think he'll do aught; but if he does, 'twill be there. Mrs. Baskerville be taking very unkindly to the thought of leaving. She've lived here all her married life and brought all her childer there. But she've got to go. They're all off after Lady Day. Too much rent wanted by the new owner."

"Same with us," said Heathman. "These here men, who have got the places on their hands now, 'pear to think a Dartmoor farm's a gold mine. Me and my mother clear out too."

Mrs. Hacker drank again.

"And after this glass, one of you chaps will have to see me up over," she said.

"We'll all come, if you'll promise another drink at t'other end," declared Heathman; but Susan turned to Jack Head.

"You'd best to come, Jack," she declared.

He exhibited indifference, but she pressed him and he agreed.

"If I've got a man to look after me, there's no hurry," she concluded. "I'm in for a wigging as 'tis."

The easy soul stopped on until closing time, and then Mr. Head fulfilled his promise and walked homeward beside her through a foggy night. She rested repeatedly while climbing the hill to the Moor, and she talked without ceasing. Susan was exhilarated and loquacious as the result of too much to drink. Head, however, bore with her and acquired a most startling and unexpected piece of information.

He mentioned the attitude of Heathman Lintern and his fiery championship of the dead.

"I thought he'd have come across and hit me down,

because I told the naked truth about the man. And he denied that his mother was the better by a penny when Nathan died. But how about it when he was alive?"

"Truth's truth," answered Susan. "You might have knocked me down with a feather when—but there, what am I saying?"

He smelt a secret and angled for it.

"Of course, you're like one of the Baskerville family yourself, and I've no right to ask you things; only such a man as me with a credit for sense be different to the talking sort. Truth's truth, as you say, and the truth will out. But Eliza Gollop—of course she knows nothing. She couldn't keep a secret like you or me."

Mrs. Hacker stood still again and breathed hard in the darkness. Her tongue itched to tell a tremendous thing known to her; but her muddled senses fought against this impropriety.

"Two can often keep a secret that pretty well busts one," said Mr. Head with craft. He believed that Humphrey Baskerville was paying some of his brother's debts; and since this procedure might reach to him, he felt the keenest interest in it. Mrs. Lintern did not concern him. He had merely mentioned her. But Priscilla was the subject which filled Susan's mind to the exclusion of all lesser things, and she throbbed to impart her knowledge. No temptation to confide in another had forced itself upon her until the present; yet with wits loosened and honour fogged by drink, she now yearned to speak. At any other moment such a desire must have been silenced, by reason of the confession of personal wrongdoing that it entailed. Now, however, she did not remember that. She was only lusting to tell, and quite forgot how she had learned. Thus, while Head, to gain private ends, endeavoured to find whether Mr. Baskerville was paying his brother's

debts, Susan supposed that his mind ran upon quite another matter: the relations between Priscilla Lintern and Humphrey's dead brother.

Mrs. Hacker knew the truth. She had acquired it in the crudest manner, by listening at the door during an interview between Nathan's mistress and her master. This tremendous information had burnt her soul to misery ever since; but a thousand reasons for keeping the secret existed. Her own good name was involved as much as another's. She could not whisper a word for her credit's sake; and a cause that weighed far heavier with her was the credit of Eliza Gollop.

Eliza had guessed darkly at what Susan now knew; but as a result of her subterranean hints, Eliza had suffered in the public esteem, for few believed her.

To confirm Eliza and ratify her implications was quite the last thing that Mrs. Hacker would have desired to do; and yet such was the magic sleight of alcohol to masquerade in the shape of reason, justice, and right—such also its potency to conceal danger—that now this muddled woman fell. She was intelligent enough to make Jack promise on Bible oaths that he would keep her secret; and then she told him the last thing that he expected to hear.

With acute interest he waited to know Humphrey's future intentions respecting his brother's creditors; instead he listened to widely different facts.

"I'll tell you if you'll swear by the Book to keep it to yourself. I'll be the better for telling it. 'Tis too large a thing for one woman — there — all that gin — I know 'tis that have loosed my tongue even while I'm speaking. And yet, why not? You're honest. I'm sure I can't tell what I ought to do. You might say 'twas no business of mine, and I don't wish one of 'em any harm — not for the wide world do I."

"I'll swear to keep quiet enough, my dear woman.

And 'tis your sense, not your thimble of liquor, makes you want to talk to me. If not me, who? I'm the sort that knows how to keep a secret, like the grave knows how to keep its dead. I'm a friend to you and Mr. Baskerville both — his greatest friend, you might say."

"In a word, 'tis natural that young Lintern — you swear, Jack — on your Bible you swear that you won't squeak?"[1]

"I ain't got one; but I'll swear on yours. You can trust me."

"'Twas natural as Lintern got vexed down there then, and you was lucky not to feel the weight of his fist. For why — for why? He's Nathan's son! Gospel truth. They'm all his: Cora, t'other girl, and Heathman. The mother of 'em told my master in so many words; and I heard her tell him. I was just going into the room, but stopped at the door for some reason, and, before I could get out of earshot, I'd catched it. There!"

"Say you was eavesdropping and have done with it," said Mr. Head. He took this startling news very quietly, and advised Susan to do the like.

"The less you think about it, the better. What's done be done. We don't know none of the rights of it, and I'm not the sort to blame anybody — woman or man — for their private actions. 'Tis only Nathan's public actions I jumped on him for, and if Heathman was twice his son, I'd not fear to speak if 'twas a matter of justice."

"I didn't ought to have told you, but my mind's a sieve if there's a drop of gin in my stomach. I had to let it go to-night. If I hadn't told you what I knowed, so like as not I'd have told Mr. Baskerville hisself when I got back; and then 'twould have comed out that I'd listened at the door — for I did, God forgive me."

[1] *Squeak* — break silence.

Susan became lachrymose, but Jack renewed his promises and left her tolerably collected. The confession had eased her mind, calmed its excitement, and silenced her tongue also.

Jack tried to learn more of the thing that interested him personally, but upon that subject she knew nothing. She believed the general report: that Mr. Masterman, by secret understanding with the lawyer, was relieving the poorest of Nathan's creditors; and she inclined to the opinion that her master had no hand in this philanthropy.

They parted at the garden wicket of Susan's home, and Mr. Head left her there; but not before she had made him swear again with all solemnity to keep the secret.

CHAPTER V

AS Humphrey Baskerville had pointed out to his nephew Ned, disaster usually hits the weak harder than the strong, and the lazy man suffers more at sudden reverses than his neighbour, who can earn a living, come what trouble may.

Rupert and his wife were prepared to seek a new home, and Milly, at the bottom of her heart, suffered less from these tribulations than any of her husband's relations. The blow had robbed him of nothing, since he possessed nothing. To work to win Cadworthy was no longer possible, but he might do as well and save money as steadily elsewhere; and the change in their lives for Milly meant something worth having. In her heart was a secret wish that her coming child might be born in her own home. As for her husband he now waited his time, and did not immediately seek work, because Humphrey Baskerville directed delay. His reason was not given, nor would he commit himself to any promise; but he offered the advice, and Rupert took it.

Mrs. Baskerville's grief at leaving her home proved excessive. She belonged to the easy sort of people who are glad to trust their affairs in any capable control, and she suffered now at this sudden catastrophe, even as Ned suffered. She had very little money, and was constrained to look to her sons for sustenance. It was proposed that she and May should find a cottage at Shaugh; but to display her poverty daily before eyes that had seen her prosperity was not good to her. She found it hard to decide, and finally hoped to continue life in a more distant hamlet. All was still in abey-

ance, and the spring had come. Until Ned's future theatre of toil was certain, his mother would not settle anything. She trusted that he might win a respectable post, but employment did not offer. Hester's youngest son Humphrey had been provided for by a friend, and he was now working with Saul Luscombe at Trowlesworthy.

Then came a date within six weeks of the family's departure. The packing was advanced, and still nothing had been quite determined. Ned was anxious and troubled; Rupert waited for his uncle to speak. He knew of good work at Cornwood, and it was decided that his mother and May should also move to a cottage in that churchtown, unless Ned achieved any sort of work within the next few weeks. Then his plans might help to determine their own.

At this juncture, unexpectedly on a March evening, came their kinsman from Hawk House, and Rupert met him at the outer gate.

"Is your mother here?" asked the rider, and when he heard that the family was within — save Ned, who stayed at Tavistock on his quest — he dismounted and came among them.

A litter and disorder marked the house. There were packing-cases in every room; but less than a moiety of Hester's goods would leave her home. She must dwell in a small cottage henceforth, and her furniture, with much of her china and other precious things, was presently destined to be sold. The period of her greatest grief had long passed; she had faced the future with resignation for many months, and returned to her usual placidity. She and her daughter could even plan their little possessions in a new cottage, and smile together again. They had fitted their minds to the changed condition; they had calculated the probable result of the sale, and Mrs. Baskerville, thrown by these large

reverses from her former easy and tranquil optimism, had fallen upon the opposite extreme.

She now looked for no amelioration of the future, foresaw no possibility of adequate work for Ned, and was as dumb as a wounded horse or cow, even at the tragical suggestion of her son's enlistment. This he had openly discussed, but finding that none exhibited any horror before the possibility, soon dropped it again.

To these people came Mr. Baskerville — small, grey, saturnine. His eyes were causing him some trouble, and their rims were grown red. They thought in secret that he had never looked uglier, and he declared openly that he had seldom felt worse.

"'Tis the season of the year that always troubles me," he said. "Gout, gravel, rheumatism, lumbagy — all at me together. Nature is a usurer, Hester, as you may live to find out yet, for all you keep so healthy. She bankrupts three parts of the men you meet, long afore they pay back the pinch of dust they have borrowed from her. The rate of interest on life runs too high, and that's a fact, even though you be as thrifty of your powers as you please, and a miser of your vital parts, as I have always been."

"Your eyes are inflamed seemingly," said his sister-in-law. "Vivian's went the same once, but doctor soon cured 'em."

They sat in the kitchen and he spoke to May.

"If you'll hurry tea and brew me a strong cup, I'll thank you. I feel just as if 'twould do me a deal of good."

She obeyed at once, and Humphrey, exhibiting a most unusual garrulity and egotism, continued to discuss himself.

"For all my carcase be under the weather, my mind is pretty clear for me. Things be going well, I'm glad to say, and you might almost think I —— However,

no matter for that. Perhaps it ban't the minute to expect you to take pleasure at any other's prosperity. There's nothing like health, after all. You'll find yourself more peaceful now, Hester, now you know the worst of it?"

"Peaceful enough," she said. "I don't blame myself, and 'tis vain to blame the dead. Master trusted his brother Nathan, like you trust spring to bring the leaves. Therefore it was right and proper that I should do the same. 'Twas all put in his hands when Vivian died. Even if I would have, I wasn't allowed to do anything. But, of course, I trusted Nathan too. Who didn't?"

"I didn't, never — Rupert will bear me out in that. I never trusted him, though I envied the whole-hearted respect and regard the world paid him. We envy in another what's denied to ourselves — even faults sometimes. Yet I'm pretty cheerful here and there — for me. Have you heard any more said about his death and my hand in it?"

"A lot," answered Mrs. Baskerville. "And most understanding creatures have quite come round to seeing your side. Only a man here and there holds out that you were wrong."

"I may tell you that the reverend Masterman couldn't find no argument against it. He came to see me not long since. He wouldn't be kept to the case in point, but argued against the principle at large. When I pinned him to Nathan at last, he said, though reluctantly, that he believed he would have done no less for his own brother. That's a pretty good one to me — eh?"

"My Uncle Luscombe thinks you did the proper thing," declared Milly.

Presently May called them to the table and handed Humphrey his tea.

He thanked her.

"No sugar," he said, "and you ought not to take none neither, May. Trouble haven't made you grow no narrower at the waist seemingly."

The girl tried to smile, and her family stared. Jocosity in this man was an exhibition almost unparalleled. If he ever laughed it was bitterly against the order of things; yet now he jested genially. The result was somewhat painful, and none concealed an emotion of discomfort and restraint.

The old man perceived their surprise and returned into himself a little.

"You'll wonder how I come to talk so much about my own affairs, perhaps? 'Tisn't often that I do, I believe. Well, let's drop 'em and come to yours. Have you found work, Rupert?"

"I can, when you give the word. There's Martin at Cornwood wants me, and mother can come there. We've seen two houses, either of which would suit her and May very well. One, near the church, she likes best. There's a cottage that will fit me and Milly not far off."

"Why go and have an expensive move when you can live at Shaugh Prior?"

"I've got my feelings," answered the widow rather warmly. "You can't expect me to go there."

Mr. Baskerville asked another question.

"So much for you all, then. And what of Ned?"

"At Tavistock, wearing out his shoe-leather trying to find work."

"If he's only wearing out shoe-leather, no harm's done."

"He told us what you offered last year, and I'm sure 'twas over and above what many men would have done," declared Ned's mother.

"I was safe to offer it," he answered. "'Tis only

to say I'll double nought. He's not worth a box of matches a week to any man."

"They very near took him on at the riding-school when he offered to go there."

"But not quite."

"And that gave him the idea to 'list in the horse soldiers. He knows all about it, along of being in the yeomanry."

"To enlist? Well, soldiering's man's work by all accounts, though I hold 'tis devil's work myself—just the last mischief Satan finds for idle hands to do."

"It would knock sense into Ned, all the same," argued Rupert. "The discipline of it would be good for him, and he might rise."

"But he's not done it, you say?"

"No," answered Mrs. Baskerville. "He's not done it. I've suffered so much, for my part, that when he broke the dreadful thing upon me, I hadn't a tear left to shed. And the calm way I took it rather disappointed him, poor fellow. He had a right to expect to see me and May, if not Rupert, terrible stricken at such a thought; but we've been through such a lot a'ready that we couldn't for the life of us take on about it. I'm sure we both cried rivers—cried ourselves dry, you might say—when Cora Lintern threw him over; but that was the last straw. Anything more happening leaves us dazed and stupid, like a sheep as watches another sheep being killed. We can't suffer no more."

"Even when Ned went out rather vexed because we took it so calm, and said he'd end his life, we didn't do anything—did we, mother?" asked May.

"No," answered Hester. "We was past doing or caring then—even for Ned. Besides, he's offered to make a hole in the water so terrible often, poor dear fellow. 'Twas a case where I felt the Lord would look

after His own. Ned may do some useful thing in the world yet. He's been very brave over this business—brave as a lion. 'Tis nought to me. I'm old, and shan't be here much longer. But for him and May 'twas a terrible come-along-of-it."

"Ned's a zany, and ever will be," declared Humphrey. "Rupert, here, is different, and never was afraid of work. Fortune didn't fall to him, and yet 'twas his good fortune to have to face bad fortune, if you understand that. Money, till you have learned the use of it, be a gun in a fool's hand; and success in any shape's the same. If it comes afore you know the value and power of it, 'tis a curse and a danger. It makes you look awry at life, and carry yourself too proud, and cometh to harm and bitterness. I know, none so well."

They did not answer. Then May rose and began to collect the tea things.

Humphrey looked round the dismantled room, and his eyes rested on the naked mantelshelf.

"Where are all the joanies?"[1] he asked. "You used to have two big china figures up there."

"Some are packed, and some will go into the sale. They two you mean are worth money, I'm told," explained Mrs. Baskerville.

Then the visitor said a thing that much astonished her.

"'Twill give you trouble now," he remarked, "but 'twill save trouble in the end. Let me see them put back again."

Milly looked at May in wonder. To argue the matter was her first thought; but May acted.

"They be only in the next room, with other things to be sold," she said. "You can see them again, uncle, if you mind to."

[1] *Joanies* — ornaments of glass or china.

Rupert spoke while she was from the room.

"Why don't you buy 'em, uncle? They'd look fine at your place."

"Put 'em back on the shelf," answered Mr. Baskerville. "And, what's more, you may, or may not, be glad to know they can stop there. 'Tis a matter of no account at all, and I won't have no talk about it, but you can feel yourself free to stay, Hester, if you'd rather not make a change at your time of life. You must settle it with Rupert and your darter. In a word, I've had a tell with the owner of the farm and he's agreeable."

"I know he's agreeable," answered Humphrey's nephew, "but I'm not agreeable to his rent."

"If you'd keep your mouth shut till you'd heard me, 'twould be better. I was going to say that Mr. Westcott of Cann Quarries, who foreclosed on the mortgage of this place when your uncle died — Mr. Westcott is agreeable to let me have Cadworthy; and, in a word, Cadworthy's mine."

May came in at this moment with the old china figures. She entered a profound silence, and returned the puppets to their old places on the mantelpiece. It seemed that this act carried with it support and confirmation of the startling thing that Hester Baskerville had just heard.

Humphrey spoke again.

"Past candle-teening, and snow offering from the north. I must be gone. Fetch up my pony, Rupert, and then you can travel a bit of the way back along with me."

His nephew was glad to be gone. A highly emotional spirit began to charge the air. Hester had spoken to May, and her daughter, grown white and round-eyed, was trying to speak.

"You mean — you mean we can all stop, and Rupert can go on here?" she said at last.

"If he thinks it good enough. He'd bought back a bit of the place a'ready, as he thought, from Ned. I can go into all that with him. And for you women — well, you're used to the rounds of Cadworthy, and I'm used to your being here. You've done nought but trust a weak man. I don't want all the blue[1] to be off the plum for you yet. But I waited till now, because you'll see, looking back, that you'll be none the worse for smarting a few months. I've smarted all my life, and I'm not very much the worse, I suppose. So now I'll be gone, and you can unpack when you please."

They could not instantly grasp this great reversal of fortune.

"Be you sure?" asked his niece. "Oh, uncle, be you sure?"

"Sure and sure, and double sure. A very good investment, with a man like your brother Rupert to work it for me. But let him see the rent's paid on the nail."

He rose, and Mrs. Baskerville tried to rise also, but her legs refused to carry her.

"Get my salts," she said to Milly; then she spoke to her brother-in-law.

"I'm a bit dashed at such news," she began. "It have made my bones go to a jelly. 'Tis almost too much at my age. The old can't stand joy like the young; they'm better tuned to face trouble. But to stop here — to stop here — 'tis like coming back after I'd thought I was gone. I can't believe 'tis true. My God, I'd said 'good-bye' to it all. The worst was over."

"No, it wasn't," answered Humphrey. "You think 'twas; but I know better. The worst would have come the day the cart waited, and you got up and drove off. Now cheer yourself and drink a drop of

[1] *Blue* — bloom.

spirits. And don't expect Rupert home till late. I'll take him back with me to supper."

He offered his hand, and the woman kissed it. Whereupon he uttered a sound of irritation, looked wildly at her, and glared at his fingers as though there had been blood upon them instead of tears. Milly stopped with Mrs. Baskerville; May went to the door with her uncle and helped him into his coat.

"I can't say nothing," she whispered. "It won't bear talking about — only — only —— If you knew how I loved mother ——"

"Be quiet," he answered. "Don't you play the fool too. I let you fret to get your fat down a bit — that was the main reason, I do believe; and now you'll only get stouter than ever, of course. Go back to her, and let's have no nonsense; and, mind, when I come over again, that my house is tidy. I never see such a jakes of a mess as you've got it in."

He went out and met Rupert at the gate.

"You'd best to come back with me," he said. "I've told them you'll sup at Hawk House. 'Twill give 'em time to calm down. It takes nought to fluster a woman."

"'Nought'! You call this 'nought'!"

Rupert helped Mr. Baskerville on to his pony and walked beside him. It was now nearly dark, and a few flakes of snow already fell.

"Winter have waited for March," said Humphrey; "and I waited for March. You might ask why for I let 'em have all this trouble. 'Twas done for their good. They'll rate what they've got all the higher now that it had slipped from them; and so will you."

Rupert said nothing.

"Yes," repeated his uncle; "winter waited for the new year, and so did I. And now 'tis for you to say whether you'll stop at my farm or no."

"Of course, I'll stop."

"No silly promises, mind. This is business. You needn't be thanking me; and in justice we've got to think of that fool, your elder brother. But be it as it will, 'tis Hester's home for her time."

"I'll stop so long as my mother lives."

"And a bit after, I hope, if you don't want to quarrel with me. But I shall be dead myself, come to think of it. What shall I forget next? So much for that. We'll go into figures after supper."

"I know you don't want no thanks nor nothing of that sort," said Rupert; "but you know me pretty well, and you know what I feel upon it. 'Tis a masterpiece of goodness in you to do such a thing."

"Say no more. I've killed two birds with one stone, as my crafty manner is. That's all. 'Tis a very good farm, and I've got it cheap; and I've got you cheap — thanks to your mother. I benefit most — my usual way in business."

They passed along, and the snow silenced the foot-fall of horse and man. Near Hawk House came the sudden elfin cry of a screech-owl from the darkness of the woods.

"Hush!" said Humphrey, drawing up. "List to that. I'm glad we heard it. A keeper down along boasted to me a week ago that he'd shot every owl for a mile round; but there's a brave bird there yet, looking round for his supper."

The owl cried again.

"'Tis a sound I'm very much addicted to," explained Mr. Baskerville. "And likewise I'm glad to hear the noise of they kris-hawks sporting, and the bark of a fox. They be brave things that know no fear, and go cheerful through a world of enemies. I respect 'em."

"You never kill a snake, 'tis said."

"Not I — I never kill nought. A snake's to be pitied, not killed. He'll meddle with none as don't meddle with him. I've watched 'em scores an' scores o' times. They be only humble worms that go upon their bellies dirt low, but they gaze upward for ever with their wonnerful eyes. Belike Satan looked thus when they flinged him out of heaven."

"You beat me," said Rupert. "You can always find excuses for varmints, never for men."

His uncle grunted.

"Most men are varmints," he answered.

CHAPTER VI

THE effect of his financial tribulation on Jack Head was not good. Whatever might have been of Humphrey Baskerville's theories as to the value worldly misfortune and the tonic property of bad luck upon character, in this man's case the disappearance of his savings deranged his usual common-sense, and indicated that his rational outlook was not based upon sure foundations. From the trumpery standpoint of his personal welfare, it seemed, after all, that he appraised life; and upon his loss a native acerbity and intolerance increased. He grew morose, his quality of humour failed him, and his mind, deprived of this cathartic and salutary sense, grew stagnant. At his best Jack was never famed for a delicate choice of time or place when pushing his opinions. Propriety in this connection he took pleasure in disregarding. He flouted convention, and loved best to burst his bombshells where they were most certain to horrify and anger. Following the manner of foolish propagandists, he seldom selected the psychological moment for his onslaughts; nor did he perceive that half the battle in these cases may depend upon nice choice of opportunity.

There came an evening, some time after he had learnt the secret of the Lintern family, when Head, returning to Shaugh Prior, fell in with Cora, who walked upon the same road. He had never liked her, and now remembered certain aggressive remarks recently cast at him by her brother. The man was going slower than the woman, and had not meant to take

any notice of her, but the somewhat supercilious nod she gave him touched his spleen, and he quickened his pace and went along beside her.

"Hold on," he said, "I'll have a tell with you. 'Tisn't often you hear sense, I believe."

Cora, for once in a mood wholly seraphic over private affairs, showed patience.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry, but I've always got time to hear sense," she said.

Thus unexpectedly met, Mr. Head found himself with nothing to say. One familiar complaint at that time running against Cora for the moment he forgot. Therefore he fell back upon her brother.

"You might tell Heathman I was a good bit crossed at the way he spoke to me two nights agone. I've as much right to my opinion as him, and if I say that the late Nathan Baskerville was no better than he should be, and not the straight, God-fearing man he made us think — well, I'm only saying what everybody knows."

"That's true," she said. "Certainly a good many people know that."

"Exactly so. Then why for does he jump down my throat as if I was backbiting the dead? Truth's truth, and it ban't a crime to tell the truth about a man after he's dead, any more than it be while he's alive."

"More it is. Very often you don't know the truth till a man's dead. My brother's a bit soft. All the same, you must speak of people as you find them. And Heathman had no quarrel with Mr. Baskerville, though most sensible people had seemingly. He was a tricky man, and nobody can pretend he was honest or straight. He's left a deal of misery behind him."

The relationship between Cora and Nathan Baskerville suddenly flashed into Jack's memory. Her remark told him another fact: he judged from it that she could not be aware of the truth. It seemed improb-

able that Cora could utter such a sentiment if she knew that she spoke of her father. Then he remembered how Heathman certainly knew the truth, and he assumed that Cora must also know it. She was, therefore, revealing her true thoughts, secure in the belief that, since her companion would be ignorant of the relationship between her and the dead, she need pretend to no conventional regard before him. At another time Jack Head might have approved her frankness, but to-day he designed to quarrel, and chose to be angered at this unfilial spirit. Upon that subject his mouth was sealed, but there returned to him the recollection of her last achievement. He reminded her of it and rated her bitterly.

"Very well for you to talk of dishonest men and crooked dealings," he retorted. "You, that don't know the meaning of a straight deed — you that flung over one chap and made him hang himself, and now have flung over another. You may flounce and flirt and walk quick, but I'll walk quick too, and I tell you you're no better than a giglet wench — heartless, greedy, good for nought. You chuck Ned Baskerville after keeping him on the hooks for years. And why? Because he came down in the world with a run, and you knew that you'd have to work if you took him, and couldn't wear fine feathers and ape the beastly people who drive about in carriages."

Her lips tightened and she flashed at him.

"You stupid fool!" she said. "You, of all others, to blame me — you, who were never tired of bawling out what a worthless thing the man was. You ought to be the first to say he's properly punished, and the first to say I'm doing the right thing; and so you would, but just because you've lost a few dirty pounds, you go yelping and snarling at everybody. You're so mighty clever that perhaps you'll tell me why I should marry

a pauper, who can't find work far or near, because he's never learnt how to work. Why must I keep in with a man like that, and get children for him, and kill myself for him, and go on the parish at the end? You're so fond of putting everybody right, perhaps you'll put me right."

The other was not prepared for this vigorous counter-attack.

"Very well for you to storm," he said; "but you only do it to hide your own cowardly nature. You pretended you was in love with him, and took his gifts, and made him think you meant to marry him, and stick up for him for better, for worse; but far from it. You was only in love with his cash, and hadn't got no use for the man. I'm not saying you would do well to marry him for the minute; but to chuck him when he's down ——"

"You're a one-sided idiot — like most other men," she answered. "'Tis so easy for you frosty creatures, with no more feeling than a frog, to talk about 'love' and 'waiting.' There, you make a sane woman wild! Waiting, waiting — and what becomes of *me* while I'm waiting? I'm a lovely woman, you old fool, don't you understand what that means? Waiting — waiting — and will time wait? Look at the crows'-feet coming. Look at the line betwixt my eyebrows and the lines from my nose, each side, to the corners of my mouth. Will they wait? No, curse 'em, they get deeper and deeper, and no rubbing will rub 'em out, and no waiting will make them lighter. So easy to bleat about 'faithfulness' and 'patience' if you're ugly as a gorilla and flat as a pancake. I'm lovely, and I'm a pauper, and I've got nought but loveliness to stand between me and a rotten life and a rotten death in the workhouse. So there it is. Don't preach no more of your cant to me, for I won't have it."

She was furious; the good things in her mind had slipped for the moment away. While uttering this tirade she stood still, and Mr. Head did the like. He saw her argument perfectly well. He perceived that she had reason on her side, but her impatience and scorn angered him. Her main position he could not shake, but he turned upon a minor issue and made feeble retort.

His answer failed dismally in every way. Of its smallness and weakness she took instant advantage; and, further, it reminded her of the satisfactory event that Mr. Head had for the moment banished from her mind.

"Hard words won't make the case better for you," he began. "And to be well-looking outside is nought if you're damned ugly inside; and that's what you be; and that's what everybody very well knows by now."

She sneered at him.

"Parson's talk — and poor at that. If you want to snuffle that sort of trash you'd better ask Mr. Masterman to teach you how. You, of all folk — so wise and such a book-reader! What's the good of telling that to me? 'Tis the outside we see, and the outside we judge by; and, for the rest, you'll do well to mind your own business, and not presume to lecture your betters."

"Very grand! Very high and mighty, to be sure. That's how you talked to Humphrey Baskerville, I suppose, and got a flea in your ear for your pains. And I'll give you another. 'Tis the inside that matters, and not the out, though your empty mind thinks different. And mark this: you'll go begging now till you're an old woman; and 'twon't be long before you'll have your age dashed in your face by every female you anger. Yes, you'll go begging now — none will have you — none will take you with your

record behind you. An old maid you'll be, and an old maid you'll deserve to be. You just chew the end of that."

"What a beast you are!" she retorted. "What a low-minded, cowardly creature to strike a woman so. But you spoke too soon as usual. The likes of you to dare to say that! You, that don't know so much about women as you do about rabbits!"

"I know enough about men, anyhow, and I know no man will ever look at you again."

"Liar! A man asked me to marry him months ago! But little did I think you'd be the first to know it when we decided that it should be known. He asked, and he was a man worth calling one, and I took him, so you may just swallow your own lies again and choke yourself with 'em. You're terrible fond of saying everybody's a fool — well, 'twill take you all your time to find a bigger one than yourself after to-day. And don't you never speak to me again, because I won't have it. Like your cheek — a common labouring man! — ever to have spoke to me at all. And if you do again, I'll tell Mr. Timothy Waite to put his whip round your shoulders, so now then!"

"Him!"

"Yes, 'him'; and now you can go further off, and keep further off in future."

She hastened forward to carry her news to other ears, and Jack Head stood still until she was out of sight. He felt exceedingly angry, but his anger swiftly diminished, and he even found it possible to laugh at himself before he reached Shaugh Prior. He knew right well that he must look a fool, but the knowledge did not increase his liking for Cora Lintern. He reflected on what he had heard, and saw her making fun of him in many quarters. He even debated a revenge, but no way offered. Once he speculated as to what

her betrothed would say if he knew the truth of Cora's paternity; but, to do him justice, not the faintest thought of revealing the secret tempted Jack.

"Leave it, and she'll most likely wreck herself with him," he thought. "Waite's a sharp chap, and not easily hoodwinked. So like as not, when he's seen a bit of her mean soul he'll think twice while there's time."

Mr. Head began to reflect again upon his own affairs, and, finding himself at the vicarage gate, went in and asked for Dennis Masterman. The rumour persisted, and even grew, that Dennis was paying back certain losses incurred at Nathan Baskerville's death among the poorest of the community. The fact had wounded Mr. Head's sense of justice, and he was determined to throw some light on Masterman's foggy philanthropy. The vicar happened to be in, and soon Mr. Head appeared before him. Their interview lasted exactly five minutes, and Jack was in the street again. He explained his theory at some length, and gave it as his opinion that to pick and choose the cases was not defensible. He then explained his own loss, and invited Mr. Masterman to say whether a more deserving and unfortunate man might be found within the quarters of the parish. The clergyman listened patiently and answered with brevity.

"I hear some of the people are being helped, but personally the donor is not known to me. I have nothing to do with it. He, or she — probably a lady, for they do that sort of thing oftenest — is not responsible to anybody; but, as far as I have heard, a very good choice has been made among the worst sufferers. As to your case, Jack, it isn't such a very hard one. You are strong and hale still, and you've got nobody to think of but yourself. We know, at any rate, that Mr. Nathan Baskerville did a lot of good with other

people's money. Isn't that what you Socialists are all wanting to do? But I dare say this misfortune has modified your views a little here and there. I've never yet met a man with fifty pounds in the bank who was what I call a Socialist. Good-evening to you, Jack."

CHAPTER VII

ALICE MASTERMAN, the vicar's sister, came in to speak with Dennis after Jack Head had gone. He was composing a sermon, but set it aside at once, for the tone of her voice declared that she could brook no denial.

"It's Voysey," she said. "I'm sorry to trouble you about him again, but he's got bronchitis."

"Well, send him some soup or something. Has that last dozen of parish port all gone yet?"

"I was thinking of another side to it," she confessed. "Don't you think this might be an excellent opportunity to get rid of him?"

"Isn't that rather hitting a man when he's down?"

"Well, it's perfectly certain you'll never hit him when he's up again. If you only realised how the man robs us—indirectly, I mean. He doesn't actually steal, I suppose, but look at the seed and the thousand and one things he's always wanting in the garden, and nothing to show but weeds."

"You must be fair, Alice. There are miles of large, fat cabbages out there."

"Cabbages, yes; and when I almost go down on my knees for one, he says they're not ready and mustn't be touched. He caught the cook getting a sprig of parsley yesterday, and was most insolent. She says that if he opens his mouth to her again she'll give warning; and she means it. And even you know that cooks are a thousand times harder to get than gardeners."

Dennis sighed and looked at his manuscript.

"Funny you should say these things — I'm preaching about the fruits of the earth next Sunday."

"The man's maddening — always ready with an excuse. The garden must be swarming with every blight and horror that was ever known, according to him. And somehow I always feel he's being impertinent all the time he's speaking to me, though there's nothing you can catch hold of. Now it's mice, and now it's birds, and now it's canker in the air, or some nonsense; and now it's the east wind, and now it's the west wind — I'm sick of it; and if you ask for an onion he reminds you, with quite an injured air, that he took three into the house last week. There's a wretched cauliflower we had ages ago, and he's always talking about it still, as if it had been a pineapple at least."

"I know he's tiresome. I tell you what — wait till he's back, and then I'll give him a serious talking to."

"Only two days ago I met him lumbering up with that ridiculous basket he always will carry — a huge thing, large enough to hold a sack of potatoes. And in the bottom were three ridiculous little lettuces from the frame, about as long as your thumb. I remonstrated, and, of course, he was ready. 'I know to a leaf what his reverence eats,' he said; 'and if that woman in the kitchen, miscalled a cook, don't serve 'em up proper, that's not my fault.' He didn't seem to think I ever ate anything out of the garden."

"Old scoundrel! I'll talk to him severely. I've had a rod in pickle ever since last year."

Dennis laughed suddenly, but his sister was in no laughing mood.

"I really can't see the funny side," she declared.

"Of course not. There is none. He's a fraud; but I remembered what Travers said last year — you recollect? The thrips and bug and all sorts of things got into the vines, and we asked Travers what was

the matter, and he explained what a shameful muddle Voysey had made. Then, when Joe had gone chattering off, saying the grapes were worth five shillings a pound in open market, and that they'd only lost their bloom because we kept fingering them, Travers said he looked as if he was infested with thrips and mealy bug himself. I shall always laugh when I think of that — it was so jolly true."

"I hate a man who never owns that he is wrong; and I do wish you'd get rid of him. It's only fair to me. I have but few pleasures, and the garden is one of them. He tramples and tears, and if you venture to ask him to tidy — well, you know what happens. The next morning the garden looks as though there had been a plague of locusts in it — everything has gone."

"He ought to retire; but he's saved nothing worth mentioning, poor old fool!"

"That's his affair."

"It ought to be; but you know well enough that improvidence all round is my affair. We are faced with it everywhere. Head has just been in here. There's a rumour about the poor people that the innkeeper swindled. He took their savings, and there's nobody to pay them back now he's gone. But it seems that here and there those hit hardest — mostly women — have had their money again. Not your work, I hope, Alice? But I know what you do with your cash. Voysey was talking about it a little time ago, and I blamed him for not having saved some money himself by this time. He said, 'Better spend what you earn on yourself than give it to somebody else to save for you.' The misfortunes of the people seemed to have pleased him a good deal. 'We'm mostly in the same box now,' he said; 'but I had the rare sense to spend my brass myself. I've

had the value of it in beer and tobacco, if no other way.'"

"Detestable old man! And Gollop's no better. Anybody but you would have got rid of them both years and years ago."

"They must retire soon — they simply must. They're the two eldest men in the parish."

"And, of course, you'll pension them, or some such nonsense."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing. Perhaps this is the end of Voysey. He may see the sense of retiring now."

"Not he. He'll be ill for six weeks, and lie very snug and comfortable drawing his money at home; then, when the weather gets to suit him, he'll crawl out again. And everything that goes wrong all through next year will be owing to his having been laid by."

"I'll talk to him," repeated her brother. "I'll talk to him and Gollop together. Gollop has pretty well exhausted my patience, I assure you."

Miss Masterman left him with little hope, and he resumed his sermon on the fruits of the earth.

But next Sunday the unexpected happened, and Thomas Gollop, even in the clergyman's opinion, exceeded the bounds of decency by a scandalous omission.

It happened thus. The sexton, going his rounds before morning service, was confronted with an unfamiliar object in the churchyard. A tombstone had sprung up above the dust of Nathan Baskerville. He rubbed his eyes with astonishment, because the time for a memorial was not yet, and Thomas must first have heard of it and made ready before its erection. Here, however, stood what appeared to be a square slate, similar in design to those about it; but

investigation proved that an imitation stone had been set up, and upon the boards, painted to resemble slate, was inscribed a ribald obituary notice of the dead. It scoffed at his pretensions, stated the worst that could be said against him, and concluded with a scurrility in verse that consigned him to the devil.

Now, by virtue of his office, apart from the fact of being a responsible man enlisted on the side of all that was seemly and decorous, Mr. Gollop should have removed this offence as quickly as possible before any eye could mark it. Thus he would have disappointed those of the baser sort who had placed it there by night, and arrested an outrage before any harm was done by it. But, instead, he studied the inscription with the liveliest interest, and found himself much in sympathy therewith.

Here was the world's frank opinion on Nathan Baskerville. The innkeeper deserved such a censure, and Thomas saw no particular reason why he should interfere. He was alone, and none had observed him. Therefore he shuffled off and, rather than fetch his spade and barrow to dig up this calumny and remove it, left the board for others to discover.

This they did before the bells began to ring, and when Dennis Masterman entered the churchyard, on his way to the vestry, he was arrested by the sight of a considerable crowd collected about the Baskerville graves. The people were trampling over the mounds, and standing up on the monuments to get a better view. On the outskirt of the gathering was Ben North in a state of great excitement; but single-handed the policeman found himself unable to cope with the crowd. A violent quarrel was proceeding at the centre of this human ring, and Masterman heard Gollop's voice and that of Heathman Lintern. Dennis ordered some yelling choir-boys down off a flat tomb, then pushed his

way through his congregation. Parties had been divided as to the propriety of the new monument, and the scene rather resembled that in the past, when Nathan Baskerville was buried.

As the vicar arrived, Heathman Lintern, who had lost his self-control, was just knocking Mr. Gollop backwards into the arms of his sister. The man and woman fell together, and, with cries and hisses, others turned on Heathman. Then a force rallied to the rescue. Sunday hats were hurled off and trampled into the grass; Sunday coats were torn; Sunday collars were fouled. Not until half a dozen men, still fighting, had been thrust out of the churchyard, was Dennis able to learn the truth. Then he examined the cause of the riot and listened to Lintern.

The young man was bloody and breathless, but he gasped out his tale. A dozen people were already inspecting the new gravestone when Heathman passed the church on his way to chapel with his mother and sisters. He left them to see the cause of interest, and, discovering it, ordered Gollop instantly to remove it. This the sexton declined to do on the ground that it was Sunday. Thereupon, fetching tools, Heathman himself prepared to dig up the monument. But he was prevented. Many of the people approved of the joke and decreed that the board must stand. They arrested Heathman in his efforts to remove it. Then others took his side and endeavoured to drag down the monument.

Having heard both Lintern and Gollop, the clergyman read the mock inscription.

"D'you mean to say that you refuse to remove this outrageous thing?" he asked the sexton; but Thomas was in no mood for further reprimand. He had suffered a good deal in credit and temper. Now he mopped a bleeding nose and was insolent.

"Yes, I do; and I won't break the Fourth Commandment for you or fifty parsons. Who the mischief be you to tell me to labour on the Lord's Day, I should like to know? You'll bid me covet my neighbour's ass and take my neighbour's wife next, perhaps? And, when all's said, this writing be true and a lesson to the parish. Let 'em have the truth for once, though it do turn their tender stomachs."

"Get out of the churchyard, you old blackguard!" cried Heathman. "You're a disgrace to any persuasion, and you did ought to be hounded out of a decent village."

"Leave Gollop to me, Lintern. Now lend a hand here, a few of you; get this infamous thing away and destroyed before anybody else sees it. And the rest go into church at once. Put on your surplices quick, you boys; and you, Jenkins, tell Miss Masterman to play another voluntary."

Dennis issued his orders and then helped to dig up this outrage among the tombs. Thomas Gollop and his sister departed together. Ben North, Lintern, and another assisted Mr. Masterman.

Then came Humphrey Baskerville upon his way to church, and, despite the entreaty of the young clergyman that he would not read the thing set up over Nathan's grave, insisted on doing so.

"I hear in the street there's been a row about a tombstone to my brother. Who put it there? 'Tis too soon by half. I shall lift a stone to the man when the proper time comes," he said.

"It isn't a stone, it's an unseemly insult—an outrage. Not the work of Shaugh men, I hope. I shall investigate the thing to the bottom," answered Dennis.

"Let me see. Stay your hand, Lintern."

The old man put on his glasses deliberately, and read the evil words.

"Tear it down," he said. "That ban't all the truth about the man, and half the truth is none. Quick, away with it! There's my sister-in-law from Cadworthy coming into the gate."

The burlesque tombstone was hurried away, and Masterman went into the vestry. Others entered church, and Heathman at last found himself alone. The bells stopped, the organ ceased to grunt, and the service proceeded; but young Lintern was only concerned with his own labours. He ransacked Mr. Gollop's tool-shed adjoining the vestry. It was locked, but he broke it open, and, finding a hatchet there, proceeded to make splinters of the offending inscription. He chopped and chopped until his usual equitable humour returned to him. Then, the work completed, he returned to his father's grave and repaired the broken mound. He was engaged upon this task to the murmur of the psalms, when Jack Head approached and bade him 'good-morning.'

"A pretty up-store, I hear. And you in the midst of it — eh?"

"I was, and I'd do the same for any chap that did such a beastly thing. If I thought you had any hand in it, Jack ——"

The other remembered that the son of the dead was speaking to him.

"Not me," he answered. "I have a pretty big grudge against Nathan Baskerville that was, and I won't deny it; but this here — insults on his tomb — 'tis no better than to kick the dead. Besides, what's the use? It won't right the wrong, or put my money back in my pocket. How did it go — the words, I mean?"

"I've forgot 'em," answered Heathman. "Least said, soonest mended, and if it don't do one thing, and that is get Gollop the sack, I shall be a bit astonished."

He laughed.

"You should 'a' seen the old monkey just now! He was the first to mark this job, and he let it stand for all to see, and was glad they should see it — shame to him."

"Wrote it himself so like as not."

"Hadn't the wit to. But he left it, and he was well pleased at it. And then, when I ordered him as sexton to take it down, he wouldn't, and so I lost my head and gave him a tap on the ribs, and over he went into his sister's arms, as was standing screeching like a poll-parrot just behind him. Both dropped; then Tom Sparkes hit me in the mouth; and so we went on very lively till Mr. Masterman came."

"Wouldn't have missed it for money," said Jack. "But just my luck to be t'other side the village at such a moment."

He sat down on a sepulchre and filled his pipe. He knew well why Heathman had thrown himself so fiercely into this quarrel, and he admired him for it. The sight of the young man reminded him of his sister.

"So your Cora is trying a third, she tells me?"

"Yes; 'tis Tim Waite this time," answered Cora's brother. "I shouldn't envy him much — or any man who had to live his life along with her."

"You're right there: no heart — that's what was left out when she was a-making. She told me the news a bit ago, just when I was giving her a rap over the knuckles on account of that other fool, Ned Baskerville. And she got the best of the argument — I'll allow that. In fact, you might say she scored off me proper, for I told her that no decent chap would ever look at her again, and what does she answer? Why, that Tim Waite's took her."

"Yes, 'tis so. He and me was talking a bit ago. He'll rule her."

"But I got it back on Cora," continued Mr. Head. "I'm not the sort to be beat in argument and forget it. Not I! I'll wait, if need be, for a month of Sundays afore I make my answer; but I always laugh last, and none don't ever get the whip-hand of me for long. And last week I caught up with her again, as we was travelling by the same road, and I gave her hell's delights, and told her the ugly truth about herself till she could have strangled me if she'd been strong enough."

"I know you did. She came home in a pretty tantara — blue with temper; and she's going to tell Waite about it. But don't you sing small, Jack; don't you let Timothy bully you."

"No man bullies me," said Head; "least and last of all a young man. Waite have too much sense, I should hope, to fall foul of me. But if it comes to that, I can give him better than he'll give me — a long sight better, too."

"The Cadworthy people have been a bit off us since Cora dropped Ned," declared Heathman. "No wonder, neither, but my mother's cruel galled about it. 'Twasn't her fault, however. Still, that's how it lies."

Mr. Head was examining this situation when the people began to come out of church.

He rose, therefore, and went his way, while Heathman also departed. Many returned to the outraged grave, but all was restored to order, and nothing remained to see.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK HEAD presently carried his notorious grievances to Humphrey Baskerville, and waited upon him one evening in summer time. They had not met for many weeks, and Jack, though he found little leisure to mark the ways of other people at this season, could not fail to note a certain unwonted cheerfulness in the master of Hawk House. Humphrey's saturnine spirit was at rest for the moment. To-night he talked upon a personal topic, and found evident pleasure in a circumstance which, from the standpoint of his visitor, appeared exceedingly trivial. The usual relations of these men seemed changed, and Mr. Baskerville showed the more reasonable and contented mind, while Jack displayed an active distrust of everything and everybody.

"I wanted a bit of a tell with you," he began, "and thought I might come over."

"Come in and welcome," answered Humphrey. "I hope I see you pretty middling?"

"Yes, well enough for that matter. And you?"

"Never better. 'Tis wonnerful how the rheumatics be holding off — along of lemons. You might stare, but 'tis a flame-new remedy of doctor's. Lemon juice — pints of it."

"Should have reckoned there was enough lemon in your nature without adding to it."

"Enough and to spare. Yet you needn't rub that home to-day. I've heard a thing that's very much pleased me, I may tell you. Last news such a cranky and uncomfortable man as me might have expected."

"Wish I could hear summat that would please me, I'm sure," said Jack. "But all that ever I hear of nowadays is other people's good luck. And there's nothing more damned uninteresting after a bit. Not that I grudge t'others ——"

"Of course you don't — not with your high opinions. You've said to me a score of times that there's no justice in the world, therefore 'tis no use your fretting about not getting any. We must take things as we find them."

"And what's your luck, then? More money rolling in, I suppose?"

"My luck — so to call it — mightn't look over large to another. 'Tis that my nephew Rupert and his wife want for me to be godfather to their babe. The child will be called after me, and I'm to stand godfather; and I'll confess to you, in secret, that I'm a good deal pleased about it."

Jack sniffed and spat into the fire. He took a pipe out of his pocket, stuffed it, and lighted it before he answered.

"I was going to say that little things please little minds, but I won't," he began. "If you can find pleasure in such a trifle — well, you'm fortunate. I should have reckoned with all the misery there is in the world around you, that there'd be more pain than pleasure in ——"

He broke off.

"'Tis the thought," explained Mr. Baskerville. "It shows that they young people feel towards me a proper and respectful feeling. It shows that they'd trust me to be a godparent to this newborn child. I know very well that folk are often asked just for the sake of a silver spoon, or a christening mug; but my nephew Rupert and his wife Milly be very different to that. There's no truckling in them. They've thought this out, and

reckoned I'm the right man — old as I am. And naturally I feel well satisfied about it."

"Let that be, then. If you're pleased, their object be gained, for naturally they want to please you. Why not? You must die sooner or later, though nobody's better content than me to hear you'm doing so clever just at present. But go you must, and then there's your mighty fortune got to be left to something or somebody."

"Mighty's not the word, Jack."

"Ban't it? Then a little bird tells the people a lot of lies. And, talking of cash, I'm here over that matter myself."

But Humphrey was not interested in cash for the moment.

"They sent me a very well-written letter on the subject," he continued. "On the subject of the child. 'Twas more respectful to me and less familiar to put it in writing — so they thought. And I've written back a long letter, and you shall hear just how I wrote, if you please. There's things in my letter I'd rather like you to hear."

Mr. Head showed impatience, and the other was swift to mark it.

"Another time, if 'tis all the same to you," Jack replied. "Let me get off what's on my chest first. Then I'll be a better listener. I ha'n't got much use for second-hand wisdom for the moment."

Mr. Baskerville had already picked up his letter; but now he flung the pages back upon his desk and his manner changed.

"Speak," he said. "You learn me a lesson. Ban't often I'm wrapped up in my own affairs, I believe. I beg your pardon, Head."

"No need to do that. Only, seen from my point, with all my misfortunes and troubles on my mind, this

here twopenny-halfpenny business of naming a newborn babby looks very small. You can't picture it, no doubt — you with your riches and your money breeding like rabbits. But for a man such as me, to see the sweat of his brow swept away all at a stroke — nought else looks of much account."

"Haven't you got over that yet?"

"No, I haven't; and more wouldn't you, if somebody had hit you so hard."

"Say your say then, if 'twill do you any sort of good."

"What I want to know is this. Why for do Lawyer Popham help one man and not help t'other? Why do this person — I dare say you know who 'tis — do what he's doing and pick and choose according to his fancy? It isn't Masterman or I'd have gived him a bit of my mind about it. And if I could find out who it was, I would do so."

"The grievance is that you don't get your bit back? Are you the only one?"

"No, I'm not. There's a lot more going begging the same way. And if you know the man, you can tell him from me that he may think he'm doing a very fine thing, but in my opinion he isn't."

Mr. Baskerville had relapsed into his old mood.

"So much for your sense, then — you that pride yourself such a lot on being the only sane man among us. Have you ever looked into the figures?"

"I've looked into my own figures, and they be all I care about."

"Exactly so! But them that want to right this wrong have looked into all the figures; and so they know a great deal more about 'em than you do. You're not everybody. You're a hale, hearty creature getting good wages. More than one man that put away money with my brother is dead long ago, and there are women and children to be thought

upon; and a bedridden widow, and two twin boys, both weak in the head; and a few other such items. Why for shouldn't there be picking and choosing? If you'd been going to lend a hand yourself and do a bit for charity, wouldn't you pick and choose? Ban't all life picking and choosing? Women and childer first is the rule in any shipwreck, I believe — afloat or ashore. And if you was such a born fool as to trust, because others trusted, and follow the rest, like a sheep follows his neighbour sheep, then I should reckon you deserve to whistle for your money. If this chap, who was fond of my brother and be set on clearing his name, will listen to me, you and the likes of you will have to wait a good few years yet for your bit — if you ever get it at all. You ought to know better — you as would shoulder in afore the weak! And now you can go. I don't want to see you no more, till you've got into a larger frame of mind."

"What a cur-dog you be!" said Head, rising and scowling fiercely. "So much for Christian charity and doing to your neighbour as you would have him do to you — so much for all your cant about righteousness. You wait — that's all! Your turn will come to smart some day. And if I find out this precious fool, who's got money to squander, I'll talk a bit of sense to him too. He's no right to do things by halves, and one man's claim on that scamp, your brother, is just as lawful and proper as another man's; and because a person be poor or not poor don't make any difference in the matter of right and wrong."

"That's where you're so blind as any other thick-headed beetle," snarled back Humphrey. "For my part I've looked into the figures myself, and I quite agree with Nathan's friend. None has a shadow of reason to question him or to ask for a penny from him. 'Tis his bounty, not your right."

"Very easy to talk like that. Why don't you put your fingers in your own pocket and lend a hand yourself? Not you — a sneaking old curmudgeon! And then want people to think well of you. Why the devil should they? Close-fisted mully-grubs that you are! And hark to this, Miser Baskerville, don't you pretend your nephew wants you to stand gossip for his bleating baby to pleasure you. 'Tis because he's got his weather-eye lifting on your dross. Who's like to care for you for yourself? Not a dog. Your face be enough to turn milk sour and give the childer fits."

"Get along with you," answered Humphrey. "You — of all men! I could never have believed this — never. And all for thirty-five pounds, fifteen and sevenpence! So much for your wisdom and reason. Be off and get down on your knees, if they'll bend, and ask God to forgive you."

Head snorted and swore. Then he picked up his hat and departed in a towering rage.

Mr. Baskerville's anger lasted a shorter time. He walked to the window, threw it open, listened to Head's explosive departure and then, when silence was restored, Humphrey himself went to his doorstep and looked out upon the fair June night.

Mars and a moon nearly full sailed south together through unclouded skies, and beneath them lay, first, a low horizon, whose contour, smoothed by night's hand into dim darkness, showed neither point nor peak under the stars. Beneath all, valley-born, there shone silver radiance of mist — dense and luminous in the moonlight. Apparently quiescent, this vapour in truth drifted with ghostly proper motion before the night wind, and stole from the water-meadows upward toward the high places of the Moor.

Against these shifting passages of fog, laid along the skirts of forest and above the murmuring ways of a

hidden river, ascended silhouettes of trees, all black and still against the pearly light behind them. The vapour spread in wreaths and filaments of moisture intermingled. Seen afar it was still as standing water; but to one moving beside it, the mist appeared as on a trembling loom where moonlight wove in ebony and silver. The fabric broke, ravelled, fell asunder, and then built itself up once more. Again it dislimned and shivered into separate shades that seemed to live. From staple of streams, from the cold heart of a nightly river were the shadows born; and they writhed and worshipped — poor, heart-stricken spirits of the dew — love-mad for Selene on high. Only when red Mars descended and the moon went down, did these forlorn phantoms of vapour shrink and shudder and lie closer, for comfort, to the water mother that bore them.

Hither, nigh midnight, in a frame of mind much out of tune with the nocturnal peace, passed Jack Head upon his homeward way. His loss had now become a sort of mental obsession, and he found it daily wax into a mightier outrage on humanity. He would have suffered in silence, but for the aggravation of these events whereby, from time to time, one or another of the wounded found his ill fortune healed.

Examination might have showed an impartial mind that much method distinguished the process of this alleviation.

Those responsible for it clearly possessed close knowledge of the circumstances; and they used it to minister in turn to the chief sufferers. The widows and fatherless were first indemnified; then others who least could sustain their losses.

A sane system marked the procedure; but not in the eyes of Mr. Head. First, he disputed the right of any philanthropist to select and single out in such a matter, and next, when defeated in argument on that

contention, he fell back upon his own disaster and endeavoured to show how his misfortune was among the hardest and most ill-deserved.

That man after man should be compensated and himself ignored, roused Jack to a pitch of the liveliest indignation. He became a nuisance, and people fled from him and his inevitable topic of speech. And now he had heard Humphrey Baskerville upon the subject, and found him as indifferent as the rest of the world.

The old man's argument still revolved in Jack's head and, too late, came answers to it. He moved along in the very extremity of rage, and Humphrey might have smarted to hear the things that his former friend thought against him. Then, as ill chance willed, another came through the night and spoke to Head.

Timothy Waite went happily upon his homeward way and found himself in a mood as sweet as Jack's was the reverse. For Timothy was love-making, and his lady's ripe experience enabled her to give him many pleasant hours of this amusement.

Neither was sentimental, but Cora, accustomed to the ways and fancies of the courting male, affected a certain amount of femininity, and Timothy appreciated this, and told himself that his future wife possessed a woman's charms combined with a man's practical sense. He was immensely elated at the thing he had done, and he felt gratified to find that Miss Lintern made a most favourable impression amid his friends and relations.

Now, moved thereto by his own cheerful heart, he gave Jack Head 'good night' in a friendly tone of voice and added, "A beautiful evening, sure enough."

The way was overshadowed by trees and neither man recognised the other until Waite spoke. Then Mr. Head, feeling himself within the atmosphere of a

happy being, grunted a churlish answer and made himself known.

Thereon Timothy's manner changed and he regretted his amenity.

"Is that Head?" he asked in an altered tone.

"You know my voice, I suppose."

"Yes, I do. I want to speak to you. And I have meant to for some time past. But the chance didn't offer, as you don't go to church, or any respectable place; and I don't frequent publics."

The other bristled instantly.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" he shouted.

"Nothing's the matter with me. But there's a lot the matter with you by all accounts, and since you can't keep a civil tongue in your head, it's time your betters took you in hand a bit."

Jack stared speechless at this blunt attack. The moon whitened his face, his lean jaw dropped and his teeth glimmered.

"Well, I'm damned! 'My betters'—eh?"

"Yes; no need for any silly pretence with me. You know what I think of your blackguard opinions and all that rot about equality and the rest. I'm not here to preach to you; but I am here to tell you to behave yourself where ladies are concerned. Miss Lintern has told me what you said to her, and she complained sharply about it. You may think it was very clever; but I'd have you to know it was very impertinent, coming from you to her. Why, if I'd been by, I'd have horsewhipped you. And if it happens again, I will. You're a lot too familiar with people, and seem to think you've a right to talk to everybody and anybody in a free and easy way — from parson downwards. But let me tell you, you forget yourself. I'd not have said these things if you'd been

rude to any less person than the young lady I'm going to marry. But that I won't stand, and I order you not to speak to Miss Lintern again. Learn manners — that's what you've got to do."

Having uttered this admonition, Mr. Waite was proceeding but Jack stopped him.

"I listened to you very patient," he said. "Now you've got to listen to me, and listen you shall. Why, God stiffen it, you bumbling fool! who d'you think you are, and who d'you think any man is? You be china to my cloam, I suppose? And who was your grandfather? Come now, speak up; who was he?"

"I'm not going to argue — I've told you what I wish you to do. It doesn't matter who my grandfather was. You know who I am, and that's enough."

"It is enough," said Jack; "it's enough to make a toad laugh; but I don't laugh — no laughing matter to me to be told by a vain, puffed-up booby, like you, that I'm not good enough to have speech with people. And that tousled bitch — there — and coming on what I've just heard! If it don't make me sick with human nature and all the breed!"

"Be sick with yourself," answered Timothy. "I don't want to be too hard on an uneducated and self-sufficient man; but when it comes to insulting women, somebody must intervene."

By way of answer the older man turned, walked swiftly to Waite and struck him on the breast. The blow was a hard one and served its purpose. Timothy hit back and Head closed.

"You blackguard anarchist," shouted the farmer. "You will have it, will you? Then take it!"

Jack found himself no match for a strong and angry man full twenty-five years his junior, and he reaped a very unpleasant harvest of blows, for the master of Coldstone carried an ash sapling and when he had

thrown Mr. Head to the ground he put his foot on him and flogged him heartily without heeding where his strokes might fall. Head yelled and cursed and tried to reach the other's legs and bring him down. A column of dust rose into the moonlight and Timothy's breath panted steaming upon the air. Then, with a last cruel cut across the defeated labourer's shoulders, he released him and went his way. But Head was soon up again and, with a bleeding face, a torn hand and a dusty jacket, he followed his enemy.

Rage is shrewd of inspiration. He remembered the one blow that he could deal this man; and he struck it, hoping that it might sink far deeper than the smarting surface-wounds that now made his own body ache.

"Devil — coward — garotter!" he screamed out. "You that hit old men in the dark — listen to me!"

Waite stopped.

"If you want any more, you can have it," he answered. "But don't go telling lies around the country and saying I did anything you didn't well deserve. You struck me first, and if you are mad enough to strike your betters, then you'll find they will strike back."

"I'll strike — yes, I'll strike — don't fear that. I'll strike — a harder blow than your evil hand knows how. I'll strike with truth — and that's a weapon goes deeper than your bully's stick. Hear me, and hear a bit about your young lady — 'young lady'! A woman without a father — a child got — ax her mother where and how — and then go to blazing hell — you and your nameless female both. I know — I know — and I'll tell you if you want to know. She's Nathan Baskerville's bastard — that's what your 'young lady' is! There's gall for yours. There's stroke for stroke! And see which of us smarts longest now!"

Jack took his bruises homeward and the other, dazed at such a storm, also went his way. He scoffed at such malice and put this evil thing behind him. He hastened forward, as one hastens from sudden incidence of a foul smell.

But the wounded man had sped a poison more pestilential far than any born of physical cause. The germ thus despatched grew while Waite slept; and with morning light its dimensions were increased.

Under the moon, he had laughed at this furious assault, and scorned it as the vile imagining of a beaten creature; but with daylight he laughed no longer. The barb was fast; other rumours set floating after the innkeeper's death now hurtled like lesser arrows into his bosom; and Mr. Waite felt that until a drastic operation was performed and these wounds cleansed, his peace of mind would not return.

He debated between the propriety of speaking to Cora about her father, or to Mrs. Lintern on the subject of her husband; and he decided that the latter course would be more proper.

CHAPTER IX

SUSAN HACKER and her master sat together in the kitchen. He had lighted his pipe; she was clearing away the remains of a somewhat scanty meal, and she was grumbling loudly as she did so.

"Leave it," he cried at length, "or I won't show you the christening mug for Milly's baby. It have come from Plymouth, and a rare, fine, glittering thing it is."

"I won't leave it," she answered. "You can't see the end of this, but I can. People know you've got plenty of money, but they don't know the way you're fooling it about, and presently, when you go and get ill, and your bones begin to stick through your skin, 'tis I shall be blamed."

"Not a bit of it. They all think I'm a miser, don't they? Let 'em go on thinking it. 'Tis the way of a miser's bones to stick out through his skin. Everybody knows that I live cheap from choice and always have. I hate the time given to eating and drinking."

"You've always lived like a labouring man," she admitted. "But of late, here and there, people be more friendly towards you, because you let your folk bide at Cadworthy; and I'm sick and tired of hearing Hester Baskerville tell me you don't eat enough, and Rupert and Milly too. Then there's that Gollop woman and a few other females have said things against me about the way I run this house. And 'tis bad to suffer it, for the Lord knows I've got enough on my mind without their lies."

"Get 'em off your mind, then," he answered. "You're a changed woman of late, and I'll tell you what's done it. I only found out myself a bit ago and said nought; but now I will speak. I've wondered these many weeks what had come over you, and three days since I discovered. And who was it, d'you think, told me?"

Her guilty heart thumped at Susan's ribs.

"Not Jack Head?" she asked.

"Jack? No. What does he know about you? Jack's another changed creature. He was pretty good company once, but his losses have soured him. 'Twasn't Jack. 'Twas the reverend Masterman. You've signed the pledge, I hear."

"He'd no business to tell," declared Susan. "Yes, I have signed it. I'm a wicked woman, and never another drop shall pass my lips."

"'Tis that that's made you cranky, all the same," he declared. "You was accustomed to your tipple and you miss it. However, I'm the last to say you did wrong in signing. When your organs get used to going without, you'll find yourself better company again. And don't worry about the table I keep. I live low from choice, not need. It suits me to starve a bit. I'm the better and cheerfuller for it."

But then she took up the analysis and explained to him whence his good health and spirits had sprung.

"Ban't that at all. 'Tis what you be doing have got into your blood. I know — I know. You've hid it from all of 'em, but you haven't hid it from me. I don't clean up all the rubbish you make and sift your waste-paper basket for nought. I itch to let it out! But God forgive me, I've let out enough in my time."

He turned on her angrily; then fearlessly she met his frown and he subsided.

"You re a dangerous, prying woman," he said, "and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I'm all that," she admitted; "and shame isn't the word. I'm ashamed enough, and more than ashamed."

"If you let out a breath of my little games, I'll pack you off into the street that very day, Susan."

She sat down by the fire and took her knitting off the peat box where it was usually to be found.

"You needn't fear me," she answered. "I've had my lesson. If ever I tell again what I should not, you may kick me into the gutter."

He mused over the thoughts that she had awakened.

"I know a mazing deal more about the weaknesses of my brother Nathan now than ever I did while the man was in life," he began. "He was always giving — always giving, whether he had it to give or whether he hadn't. I'm not defending him, but I know what it felt like a bit now. Giving be like drink: it grows on a man the same as liquor does. Nathan ought to have taken the pledge against giving. And yet 'tis just another example of how the Bible word never errs. On the face of it you'd think 'twas better fun to receive than to give. But that isn't so. Once break down the natural inclination, shared by the dog with his bone, to stick to what you've got — once make yourself hand over a bit to somebody else — and you'll find a wonderful interest arise out of it."

"Some might. Some would break their hearts if they had to fork out like you've been doing of late."

"They be the real misers. To them their stuff is more than food and life and the welfare of the nation. And even them, if we could tear their gold away from them, might thank us after they'd got over the operation, and found themselves better instead of worse without it."

"All that's too deep for me," she answered. "The

thing that's most difficult to me be this: How do you get any good out of helping these poor folk all underhand and unknown? Surely if a man or woman does good to others, he's a right to the only payment the poor can make him. And that's gratitude. Why won't you out with it and let them thank you?"

"You're wrong," he said. "I've lived too many years in the world to want that. I'm a fool here and there, Susan; but I'm not the sort of fool that asks from men and women what's harder to give than any other thing. To put a fellow-creature under an obligation is to have a faith in human nature that I never have had, and never shall have. No, I don't want that payment; I'm getting better value for my money than that."

"So long as you're satisfied——"

Silence followed and each pursued a private line of thought. Humphrey puffed his pipe; Susan knitted, and her wooden needles tapped and rattled a regular tune. She was wondering whether the confession that she desired to make might be uttered at this auspicious moment. Her conscience tortured her; and it was the weight of a great misery on her mind, not the fact of giving up liquor, that had of late soured her temper. She had nearly strung herself to tell him of her sins when he, from the depths of his being, spoke again. But he was scarcely conscious of a listener.

"To think that a man like me — so dark and distrustful — to think that even such a man — I, that thought my heart was cracked for ever when my son died — I, that said to myself 'no more, no more can any earthly thing fret you now.' And yet all the time, like a withered pippin — brown, dry as dust — there was that within that only wanted something — some heat to the pulp of me — to plump me out again. To think that the like of me must have

some other thing to — to cherish and foster! To think my shrivelled heart-strings could ever stretch and seek for aught to twine around again! Who'd believe it of such a man as me? God A'mighty! I didn't believe it of myself!"

"But I knowed it," said Susan. "You always went hunger-starved for people to think a bit kindly of you; you always fretted when decent folk didn't like you."

"Not that — not that now. I wanted their goodwill; but I've found something a lot higher than that. To see a poor soul happy is better far than to see 'em grateful. What does that matter? To mark their downward eye uplifted again; to note their fear for the future gone; to see hope creep back to 'em; to watch 'em walk cheerful and work cheerful; to know they laugh in their going once more; that they lie themselves down with a sigh of happiness and not of grief — ban't all that grander than their gratitude? Gratitude must fade sooner or late, for the largest-hearted can't feel it for ever, try as he may. Benefits forgot are dust and ashes to the giver — if he remembers. But none can take from me the good I've won from others' good; and none can make that memory dim."

"'Tis a fairy story," murmured Mrs. Hacker.

"No," he said, "'tis a little child's story — the thing they learn at a mother's knees; and because I was a growed-up man, I missed it. 'Tis a riddle a generous child could have guessed in a minute; but it took one stiff-necked fool from his adult days into old age afore he did."

Susan's mind moved to her purpose, and she knew that never again might fall so timely a moment. She put down her knitting, flung a peat on the fire, and spoke.

"You be full of wonderful tales to-night, but now I'll please ask you to listen to me," she began. "And mark this: you can't well be too hard upon me. I've got a pack of sins to confess, and if, when you've heard 'em, you won't do with me no more, then do without me, and send me through that door. I deserve it. There's nought that's bad I don't deserve."

He started up.

"What's this?" he said. "You haven't told anybody?"

"No, no, no. Ban't nothing about your affairs. In a word, I overheard a secret. I listened. I did it out of woman's cursed curiosity. And, as if that weren't enough, I got drunk as a fly down to 'The White Thorn' a while back and let out the truth. And nought's too bad for me — nought in nature, I'm sure."

Mr. Baskerville put down his pipe and turned to her.

"Don't get excited. Begin at the beginning: What did you hear?"

"I heard Mrs. Lintern tell you she was your brother's mistress. I heard her tell you her children was also his."

"And you're scourged for knowing it. Let that be a lesson to you, woman."

"That's only the beginning. I ban't scourged for that. I'm scourged because I've let it out again."

"I'm shocked at you," he answered. "Yes, I'm very much shocked at you; but I'm not at all surprised. I knew as sure as I knew anything that 'twould out. The Lord chooses His own time and His own tool. But that don't make your sin smaller. You're a wicked woman."

"I've signed the pledge, however, and not another drop ——"

"How many of 'em did you tell?"

"But one. Of course, I chose the man with the longest tongue. Jack Head saw me up the hill after closing time and — there 'twas — I had to squeak. But I made him swear as solemn as he knowed how that he wouldn't."

"He's not what he was. We had a proper row a month ago. I doubt if he'll ever speak to me again. And until he makes a humble apology for what he spoke, I won't hear him."

"He swore he wouldn't tell."

"Be that as it may, it will be known. It's started and it won't stop."

They talked for two hours upon the problems involved in these facts. Then there came a knock at the door and Susan went to answer it.

Mr. Baskerville heard a protracted mumble and finally, after some argument, Mrs. Hacker shut the door and returned into the kitchen with a man.

It was Jack himself.

He explained the reason for his unduly late visit. He was anxious and troubled. He spoke without his usual fluency.

"I didn't come to see you," he said. "I waited till 'twas past your hour for going to bed. But knowing that Mrs. Hacker was always later, I thought to speak to her. However, nothing would do but I came in, and here I be."

"I'll have nought to say to you, Head — not a single word — until you make a solemn apology for your infernal impudence last time you stood here afore me," said the master of Hawk House, surveying his visitor.

"So Susan tells me, and so I will then," replied Jack. "So solemn as ever you like. You was right and I was wrong, and I did ought to have been kicked from

here to Cosdon Beacon and back for what I said to you. We'm always punished for losing of our tempers. And I was damn soon punished for losing mine, as you shall hear. But first I confess that I was wrong and ax you, man to man, to forgive me."

"Which I will do, and here's my hand on it," said the other.

The old men shook hands and Susan wept. Her emotion was audible and Humphrey told her to go to bed. She refused.

"I'm in this," she said. "'Tis all my wicked fault from beginning to end, and I'm going to hear it out. I shall weep my eyes blistered afore morning."

"Don't begin now, then. If you're going to stop here, be silent," said Humphrey.

She sniffed, wiped her face, and then fetched a black bottle, some drinking water, and two glasses.

"Light your pipe and say what you feel called upon to say," concluded Humphrey to Mr. Head.

"'Tis like this," answered the other. "Every man wants to boss somebody in this world. That's a failing of human nature, and if we ain't strong enough to lord it over a fellow-creature, we try to reign over a hoss or even a dog. Something we have to be master of. Well, long since I marked that, and then, thanks to my understanding and sense, I comed to see — or I may have read it — that 'twas greater far to lord it over yourself than any other created thing."

"And harder far," said Humphrey.

"Without doubt you'm right. And I set about it, and I had myself in hand something wonderful; and very proud I felt of it, as I had the right to feel."

"Then the Lord, seeing you puffed up, sent a hard stroke to try whether you was as clever as you thought you was — and He found you were not," suggested Mr. Baskerville.

"I don't care nothing about that nonsense," answered Jack; "and, knowing my opinions, there ain't no call to drag the Lord in. All I do know is that my hard-earned savings went, and — and — well, I got my monkey up about it, and I got out of hand. Yes, I got out of hand. The awful shock of losing my thirty-five pounds odd took me off my balance. For a bit I couldn't stand square against it, and I did some vain things, and just sank to be a common, everyday fool, like most other people."

"'Tis a good thing you can see it, for 'twill end by righting your opinion of yourself."

"My opinion of myself was a thought too high. I admit it," answered Jack. "For the moment I was adrift — but only for the moment. Now I've come back to my common-sense and my high ideas, I can assure you. But the mischief is that just while I was dancing with rage and out of hand altogether, I did some mistaken things. Enough I had on my mind to make me do 'em, too. But I won't excuse 'em. I'll say, out and out, that they were very wrong. You've agreed to overlook one of those things, and you say you'll forgive me for talking a lot of rubbish against you, for which I'm terrible sorry. So that's all right, and no lasting harm there. But t'other job's worse."

Jack stopped for breath, and Susan sighed from the bottom of her immense bosom. Humphrey poured out some gin and water for his guest. Then he helped himself more sparingly.

"Here's to you," said Jack. "To drink under this roof is to be forgiven. Now I'll go on with my tale, and tell you about the second piece of work."

He related how he had left Hawk House in wrath, how he had met with Timothy Waite; how he had been reproved and how he had hit back both with his fists and his tongue.

"He knocked me down and gave me the truth of music with his heavy stick. I hit him first, and I'm not saying anything about what he did, though there may be thirty years between us; but anyway he roused Cain in me and I told him, in a word, that the woman he was going to marry was the natural child of Nathan Baskerville. 'Twas a double offence against right-doing, because I'd promised Susan here not to let it out, and because to tell Waite, of all men, was a cowardly deed against the girl, seeing he meant to marry her. But I'd quarrelled with her already, and tell him I did; and now I tell you."

He drank and stared into the fire. For some time Humphrey did not reply; but at last he expressed his opinion.

"It all depends on the sort of chap that Waite may prove to be. He'll either believe you, or he won't. If he don't, no harm's done. If he do, then 'tis his character and opinions will decide him. For his own sake we'll trust he'll throw her off, for woe betide the man that marries her; but if he loves her better than her havage, he'll go his way and care nothing. If he looks at it different, and thinks the matter can't rest there, he'll go further. For my part I can't say I care much about it. All I know is that Priscilla Lintern has rare virtues, though she weren't virtuous, and she've lived on no bed of roses, for all the brave way in which she stands up for my late brother. She won't be sorry the murder's out. When she told me — or when I told her — I made it plain that in my opinion this ought to be known. She stood for the children, not herself, and said it never must be known for their sakes. Well, now we shall see who hears it next. As for you two, you've got your consciences, and it ban't for me to come between you and them."

"Well, I've told my story, and admitted my failings

like a man," said Jack, "and, having done so, I can do no more. My conscience is cleared, and I defy it to trouble me again; and I may add that I'll take mighty good care not to give it the chance. So there you are. And come what may, I can stand to that."

"How if they deny it and have you up for libel?" asked Mr. Baskerville; but Jack flouted the idea.

"Not them," he said. "Have no fear on that score. I've got this woman for witness, and I've got you. For that matter, even if 'twas known, nobody wouldn't die of astonishment. Since the things Eliza Gollop said after Nathan died, 'twould come as a very gentle surprise, I believe. And, when all's said, who's the worse, except what be called public morals?"

Mr. Baskerville nodded.

"There's some sense in what you say, Jack. And I'm glad we're friends again. And now I'm going to bed, so I'll ax you to be gone."

Head rose, finished his refreshment, and shook Mr. Baskerville's hand.

"And I'm the better for knowing as you've been large-minded enough to forgive me," he said. "And as you can, I suppose Susan here can. I know I'm very much in her black books, and I deserve that too, and I'd make it up to her in any way I can — except to marry her. That I never will do for any woman as long as I live."

"No, and never will get the chance to," replied Susan; "and I only trust to God 'twill all die out, and we hear no more of it."

Head turned at the door and spoke a final word.

"It may interest you to know that everybody have had their money now — everybody but me and Thomas Coode, the drunken farmer at Meavy. 'Tis strange I should be put in the same class with Coode; but so it is. However, I've larned my lesson. I shall say no

more about that. Think of it I must, being but mortal, but speak I won't."

"You'll do well to forget it," answered Mr. Baskerville. "The man, or woman if 'twas one, be probably settled in their mind not to pay you or Coode back — since you're so little deserving."

Jack shrugged his shoulders, but kept his recent promise and went out silently.

CHAPTER X

A JAY, with flash of azure and rose, fluttered screaming along from point to point of a coppice hard by Hawk House, and Cora Lintern saw it. She frowned, for this bird was associated in her mind with a recent and an unpleasant incident. Her brother Heathman, whose disparate nature striking against her own produced many explosions, had recently told her that the jay was her bird — showy, tuneless, hard-hearted. She remembered the occasion of this attack, but for the moment had no energy at leisure with which to hate him; for difficulties were rampant in her own path, and chance began to treat her much as she had treated other people in the past.

In a word, her lover grew colder. As yet she had no knowledge of the reason, but the fact could not be denied, and her uneasiness increased. He saw somewhat less of her, and he made no effort to determine the time of the wedding. Neither did he invite her to do so. He had come twice to see Mrs. Lintern when Cora was not by, and an account of these visits was reported by her mother.

"I don't exactly know why he dropped in either time," said Mrs. Lintern. "He kept talking on everyday matters, and never named your name. 'Twas curious, in fact, the way he kept it out. All business, but nothing about the business of marrying you. Yet there was plenty on his mind, I do believe. I should reckon as he'd come for a special purpose, but finding himself here, it stuck in his throat. He's strong with men, but weak with women. Have he told you of aught that's fretting him?"

Her daughter could remember nothing of the sort. Neither did she confess what she did know — that Waite was unquestionably cooler than of old.

"'Tis time the day was named," declared Priscilla. "And you'd better suggest it when next you meet with him."

But Cora did not do so, because there was much in Timothy's manner that told her he desired no expedition. Some time had now elapsed since last she saw him, and to-day she was going, in obedience to a note brought by a labourer, to meet him at the Rut, half a mile from Coldstone Farm. That he should have thus invited her to come to him was typical of the change in his sentiments. Formerly he would have walked or ridden to her. The tone of his brief note chilled her, but she obeyed it, and was now approaching their tryst at evening time in early September.

In a little field nigh Hawk House she heard the purr of a corn-cutting machine. It was clinking round and round, shearing at each revolution a slice from the island of oats that still stood in the midst of a sea of fallen grain. A boy drove the machine, and behind it followed Humphrey Baskerville and Rupert. The younger man had come over to help garner the crop. Together they worked, gathered up the oats, and set them in little sheaves. The waning sunlight gilded the standing oats. Now and then a dog barked and darted round the vanishing island in the midst, for there — separated from safety by half an acre of stubble — certain rabbits squatted together, and waited for the moment when they must bolt and make their final run to death.

Cora, unseen, watched this spectacle; then Mrs. Hacker appeared with a tray, on which were three mugs and a jug of cider.

The girl was early for her appointment, but she

sauntered forward presently and marked Timothy Waite in the lower part of the valley.

It was the Rut's tamest hour of late summer, for the brightness of the flowers had ceased to shine; the scanty heath made little display, and autumn had as yet lighted no beacon fire. Stunted thorn trees ripened their harvest, but the round masses of the greater furze were dim; a prevalent and heavy green spread over the Rut, and the only colour contrast was that presented by long stretches of dead brake fern. The litter had been cut several weeks before and allowed to dry and ripen. It had now taken upon itself a dark colour, widely different from the richer, more lustrous, and gold-sprinkled splendour of auburn that follows natural death. The dull brown stuff was being raked together ready for the cart; and Cora, from behind a furze clump, watched her sweetheart carry immense trusses of the bracken and heave them up to the growing pile upon a wain that waited for the load. All she could see was a pair of straight legs in black gaiters moving under a little stack of the fern; then the litter was lifted, to reveal Timothy Waite.

Presently he looked at his watch and marked that the time of meeting was nearly come. Whereupon he donned his coat, made tidy his neckcloth, handed his fork to a labourer, and left the working party. He strolled slowly up the coomb along the way that she must approach, while she left her hiding-place and set out to meet him. He shook hands, but he did not kiss her, and he did not look into her eyes. Instead, he evaded her own glance, spoke quickly, and walked quickly in unconscious obedience to his own mental turmoil.

"I can't run," she said. "If you want me to hear what you're saying, Timothy, you must go slower, or else sit down in the hedge."

"It's terrible," he answered. "It's terrible, and it's made an old man of me. But some things you seem to know from the first are true, and some you seem to know are not. And when first I heard it I said to myself, 'Tis a damned lie of a wicked and venomous man'; but then, with time and thought, and God knows how many sleepless nights, I got to see 'twas true enough. And why wasn't I told? I ask you that. Why wasn't I told?"

Her heart sank and her head grew giddy. She translated this speech with lightning intuition, and knew too well all that it must mean. It explained his increasing coolness, his absences and evasions. It signified that he had changed his mind upon learning the secret of the Linterns.

A natural feminine, histrionic instinct made her pretend utmost astonishment, though she doubted whether it would deceive him.

"What you're talking about I haven't the slightest idea," she said. "But if you have a grievance, so have I — and more than one. You wasn't used to order me here and there six weeks ago. 'Twas you that would come and see me then; now I've got to weary my legs to tramp to do your bidding."

He paid no heed to her protest.

"If you don't understand, then you must, and before we part, too. I can't go on like this. No living man could do it. I called twice to see your mother about it, for it seemed to me that 'twas more seemly I should speak to her than to you; but when I faced her I couldn't open my mouth, much as I wanted to do so. She shook me almost, and I'd have been thankful to be shook; but 'tis the craft and cunning of the thing that's too much for me. I've been hoodwinked in this, and no doubt laughed at behind my back. That's what's made me feel as I do now.

I waited and hoped on, and loved you for years, and saw you chuck two other men, and found I'd got you at last, and reckoned I was well rewarded for all my patience; and — then — then — this ——"

"What? This what? Are you mad? What didn't you dare to speak to my mother, and yet you can speak to me? What have I done that's set you against me? What sin have I committed? Don't think I'm blind. I've seen you cooling off clear enough, and for the life of me I couldn't guess the reason, try as I would and sorrow about it as I would. But since you've ordered me here for this, perhaps you'll go straight on and tell me what's all the matter."

"I want you to answer me one question. The answer you must know, and I ask you to swear afore your Maker that you'll tell me the truth. Mind this, I know the truth. It's scorched into me like a burn this many a day. But I must hear it from you too, Cora."

She guessed his question, and also guessed that in truth lay her last hope. He spoke positively, and she doubted not that he knew. His fear before her mother was natural. She perceived how easily a man might have gone to a woman with this momentous question on his mind, and how naturally the presence of the woman might strike him dumb at the actual meeting. None knew better than Cora how different is the reality of a conversation with a fellow-creature from the imaginary interview formulated before the event. There was but one problem in her mind now — the advantage or disadvantage of truth. She judged that the case was desperate, but that her only hope lay in honesty.

"Speak," she said. "And I swear I'll answer nought but the truth — if I know the truth."

He hesitated, and considered her answer. He was

fond of her still, but the circumstance of this deception, to which he supposed her a party, had gone far to shake his affection. The grievance was that the facts should have been hidden from him after his proposal. He held that then was the time when Cora's paternity should have been divulged. He believed that had he known it then, it would have made small difference to his love. It was not so much the fact as the hiding of the fact that had troubled him.

"Who was your father?" he asked at length, and the words burst out of him in a heap, like an explosion.

"I know who he was," she answered.

"Name him, then."

"You see, Timothy, you never asked. I often thought whether there was any reason to tell you, and often and often I felt you ought to know; but you're a wise and far-seeing man, and I wasn't the only one to be thought on. I'd have told you from the first, even at the risk of angering you, but there was mother. I couldn't do it — knowing what she'd feel. I was a daughter afore I was a sweetheart. Would you have done it when you came to think on your mother?"

"Name him."

"Nathan Baskerville was my father, and my sister's and brother's father. My mother was his wife all but in name, and they only didn't marry because it meant losing money. You understand why I didn't tell you — because of my poor mother. Now you can do as you please. I'm myself anyway, and I'm not going to suffer for another's sins more than I can help. There's no stain on me, and well you know it."

"Nathan was your father?"

"He was. I suppose Heathman told you. He's threatened to oft enough."

"No matter for that. 'Tis so, and 'twas deliberately hidden from me."

"'Twas hidden from all the world. And why not? I did no wrong by hiding it, feel as I might. There was four to think of."

"'Twasn't hidden from all the world, and 'tisn't hidden. I didn't learn it from Heathman. You've brought this on yourself in a way. If you hadn't quarrelled with a certain man I shouldn't have done so either. Jack Head told me after I'd thrashed him for insulting you; and I suppose if he hadn't I might have gone to church with you, and very likely gone to my grave at last, and never known what you was."

"I should have told you when my mother died."

"D'you swear that?"

"I tell you it is so. I'm going to swear no more at your bidding. 'Tis for me to speak now. You've cut me to the quick to-day, and I doubt if I shall ever get over it. 'Tisn't a very manly way to treat an innocent girl, I should think. However, I forgive everything and always shall, for I love the ground you walk on, and you know it, and 'twasn't from any wish to treat you without proper respect that I hid away this cruel thing. I said to myself, 'It can't hurt dear Tim not to know it, and it would hurt my mother and my sister terribly if 'twas known.' So, right or wrong, I did what I did; and now you're in judgment over me, and I can't — I can't live another moment, dear Timothy, till I know how you feel about it."

She had begun in a spirit rather dictatorial, but changed swiftly into this milder appeal when she marked the expression of his face. He was prepared to stand little. From the first she felt almost hopeless that she would have power to move him.

"Who told Jack Head?" asked Timothy.

"God knows. My brother, I should think. There's none else in the world but mother and Phyllis that knew it."

"Others were told, but not me. I was deceived by all of you."

"That's not true," she answered as her fighting instinct got the better of tact. "'Twasn't to deceive you not to tell you. All families have got secrets — yours too."

"You did wrong to me. 'Tisn't even like as if I was nobody. I come of pretty good havage on my mother's side, and I think a lot of such things."

"Well, the Baskervilles ——"

"Don't be foolish, woman! D'you think I'm ——? There, 'tisn't a case for talk that I can see. The thing be done and can't be undone. I'd have overlooked it, so like as not, if you'd made a clean breast of the truth when I offered for you; but to let me go on blind — I can't forgive that."

Perceiving what had hurt him, Cora set herself to lessen the sting as much as possible; but she failed. They talked to no purpose for an hour, while she used every argument that occurred to her, and he opposed to her swift mind and subtle reasoning a blank, impassive wall of sulky anger and wounded pride. It began to grow dark before the conclusion came, and they had walked half-way back to Shaugh. At the top of the hill he left her, and the battle ended in wrath on both sides and a parting irrevocable.

Her failure it was that made Cora lose her temper, and when she did so, he, thankful for the excuse, spoke harshly, and absolved his own uneasy spirit for so doing.

The final scene was brief, and the woman, wearied in mind and body with her efforts to propitiate him, drew it down upon them.

"Why don't you speak out like a man, then?" she said at last. "Why d'you keep growling in your throat, like a brute, and not answering my questions?

'Tis because you can't answer them in right and justice. But one word you've got to find a tongue to, though well you may be shamed to do it. It shan't be said I've thrown you over, if that's the cowardly thing you're playing up for. I promised to marry you, and I would marry you; but you don't want to marry me, it seems, and you've pitched on this paltry thing to get out of it."

"'Paltry thing'! You're shameless."

"Yes, it is paltry; and everybody would say so; and you'll hear what decent people think of you pretty soon if you throw me over, I can tell you. How can a child help its own father, or see whether its parents be properly married? You're cruel and mad both."

"We'll see, then," he answered. "Since you're bent on hearing me speak, I will. And don't pretend as I'm growling and you're not hearing. I'll tell you what I mean, and my words shall be as clear as my mind is about it. I won't marry you now, and I wouldn't if you was all you ought to be. I've had a taste of your tongue this evening that's opened my mind a good bit to what you are. You've shown me a lot more about yourself than you think for. And if I did growl, like a brute, my ears was open and my wits was wide awake, like a man. And I won't marry you, and I've a perfect right not to do so after this."

"You dirty coward! No, you shan't marry me, and you shouldn't if you crawled to me across the whole world on your knees, and prayed to me to forgive you. And if you're well out of it, what am I? And don't you think you've heard the last of this, because you have not. I've got good friends and strong friends in the world, though you'd like to fancy as I was friendless and outcast, for men like you to spit on. But I can fight my own battles very well, come to that, as you shall find; and I'll have you up for breach, God's

my judge; and if decent men don't bring in proper, terrifying damages against you, I'll ask you to forgive me. Yes, I'll make your name laughed at from one end of the Moor to t'other, as you shall find afore you'm many days older."

He stood still before this threat, and, finding that he did not answer, she left him and hastened home.

There she blazed her startling news. Cora's own attitude towards the truth was now one of indifference. She raged against her fate, and for the time being could not look forward. Phyllis alone displayed grief. She was engaged to a young baker at Cornwood, and feared for her own romance: therefore she wept and revealed the liveliest concern. But Heathman, perceiving Priscilla's indifference, exhibited the like. It appeared that mother and son were glad rather than regretful at this escape of truth.

Mrs. Lintern, however, exhibited exceeding wonder, if little dismay. She was sorry for Cora, but not for herself.

"I had a feeling, strong as death in me, that 'twould come to light," she said. "Somehow I always knew that the thing must struggle out sometime. Many and many actually knew it in their hearts, by a sort of understanding — like a dog's reason. And I knew they knew it. But the truth was never openly thrust in my face till he died, and Eliza Gollop spoke it. And, she being what she is, none believed her; and 'twas enough that she should whisper scandal for the better sort to flout her and turn a deaf ear. And now it's out, and the great wonder in me ban't that 'tis out, but who let it out. For the moment it looks as if 'twas a miracle; yet, no doubt, time will clear that too."

"I suppose you'll go now," said Cora. "Anyway, if you don't, I shall. There's been nought but trouble and misery for me in this hole from my childhood upward."

CHAPTER XI

THERE visited Cadworthy Farm, on a Sunday afternoon, Priscilla Lintern with her son and her younger daughter.

They came unexpectedly, though Rupert had told Heathman they would not be unwelcome. May was from home, and the business of preparing tea fell upon Milly Baskerville. Phyllis helped Rupert's wife in this operation, and while they were absent in the kitchen and the men went to the farm, Hester and Priscilla spoke tògether. The one discussed her son, the other her daughter and herself.

"I've been coming over to see you this longful time," said Mrs. Baskerville, "but what with the weather and — and ——"

"The things that are being said, perhaps?"

"No, not them. I'm an old woman now, and if I've not got patience at my age, when shall I get it? Good things have happed to me — better than I deserved — and I'm only sorry for them as have had less fortune. I never pay no heed to stories at any time. My master taught me that."

"I merely want to tell you that 'tis all true. For my children's sake I should never have told it, but since it had to come I'm right glad."

"I'd rather you spared yourself," said Mrs. Baskerville. "You've had enough to bear, I should reckon. Leave it. I've always felt a very great respect for you, and always shall do so; and I've no wish to hear anything about it. Well I know what men are, and what life is. He was lucky — lucky in you and lucky in his

brothers. What he took away from me, Humphrey has given back. Now we'll go on as before. Mr. Waite have thrown your maiden over, I hear. What's she going to do?"

"Thank you for being kind," answered Mrs. Lintern. "I've been a good deal astonished to find how easily the people have took this thing. The world's a larger-minded place than I, for one, had any idea of. The neighbours, save here and there, seem to be like you, and reckon that 'tis no business of theirs. My son's terrible pleased that it have got out; and the young man who is going to marry Phyllis don't mean to alter his plans. And your brother is glad also, I suppose, for he wished it. But to Cora, this business of being flung over hit her very hard, and she wanted to bring an action for breach of promise against Timothy. She went to see Mr. Popham about it; only he didn't seem to think she'd get much, and advised her to do no such thing."

"Why ban't she along with you to-day?"

"She won't go nowhere. She'll be off pretty soon to a milliner's to Plymouth. She wants to clear away from everything so quick as may be."

"Natural enough. Let her go in a shop somewhere and begin again. My Ned, I may tell you, have found ——"

"Work, I hope?"

"No. Another girl to marry him. It looks as if it might go through this time, though I can't see him really married after all his adventures with the maidens. 'Tis the daughter of the livery-stable keeper at Tavistock. And she's the only one — and King — that's her father's name — worships the ground she goes on. It's like to happen after Christmas. And Ned's been straight about it, and he've broke in a young horse or two very clever for Mr. King, so I suppose

he'll let them wed for the girl's sake. He's there to-day."

Mrs. Lintern nodded.

"Where's May?" she asked. "Away too?"

"Only till evening. She's drinking tea along with her Uncle Humphrey at Hawk House."

"A strange man he is."

"'Tis strange for any man to be so good."

"He first found out about me and his brother. And how d'you reckon? From Cora. His sharp eyes saw her father in her long before Nathan died. I've been to Hawk House since it came out. He was content that Cora had suffered so sharp, and said so."

"He thinks a great deal of you and Heathman, however."

Milly brought the tea at this moment and called Heathman and Rupert, who were smoking in the farmyard. They appeared, and Milly's baby was carried to join the company. Rupert showed the cup that his godfather had given to the child.

The Baskervilles made it clear that they designed no change in their relations with Mrs. Lintern. A sharp estrangement had followed Ned's jilting, but that belonged to the past. Amity reigned, and Milly expressed regret at Mrs. Lintern's determination to leave Shaugh Prior in the following spring.

"They'll both be gone — both girls," she explained, "and Heathman here haven't got no need of a wife yet, he says, so he and I shall find a smaller and a cheaper place than Undershaugh."

"Cora will marry yet," foretold Rupert. "Third time's lucky, they say."

"'Twill be the fourth time," corrected Milly.

They ate and drank, and spoke on general subjects; then the Linterns prepared to start, and Priscilla uttered a final word to Hester before the younger people.

"I thank you for letting the past go. There was but few mattered to me, and you were the first of them."

They departed, and the Baskervilles talked about them.

Behind her back, they spoke gently of Priscilla, and old Mrs. Baskerville revealed even a measure of imagination in her speech.

"The worst was surely after he sank into his grave and the storm broke," said Hester. "To think she was standing there, his unknown, unlawful wife, yet a wife in spirit, with all a wife's love and all a wife's belief in him. To think that her ear had to hear, and her heart had to break, and her mouth had to be dumb. Gall and vinegar that woman have had for her portion these many days — yet she goes unsoured."

"She's got a rare good son to stand by her," declared Rupert.

"And so have I," murmured Milly, squeezing the baby who was sucking her breast.

"And I've got four," answered Mrs. Baskerville. "Four brave boys — one on sea and three on land. Things be divided curious; but our part is to thank God for what we've got, and not worry because them that deserve more have so much less. That's His work, and the balance will swing true again in His own good time."

Elsewhere, upon their journey home, the Linterns fell in with May. She was excited, and turned back and walked beside them for half a mile.

"I'm just bursting with news," she said, "and I hope you haven't heard it."

"The world be full of news," answered Heathman. "There's a bit down to Shaugh as I meant to tell

Rupert just now and forgot, owing to press of other matters. It proves as I'm a prophet too, for I've said this three year that it was bound to happen. And that disgrace in the churchyard over my father's grave have brought it to a climax. I mean Tommy Gollop and that other old rip, Joe Voysey. Both have got the sack! The reverend Masterman have hit out right and left and floored the pair of 'em. Mind you tell Rupert that. 'Twill make him die of laughing. The old boys be showing their teeth too, I promise you."

"I'll tell him."

"And what was your news?" asked Mrs. Lintern.

"Very good; yet perhaps no news neither to many folk who understand things better than me. Yet I'd often thought in my mind that 'twas my uncle Humphrey clearing off Uncle Nathan's ——"

She stopped, brought to silence by the recollection of their relationship.

"Say it," said Priscilla. "I know what's on your lips. Don't fear to say it."

"That 'twas Uncle Humphrey made all right," continued May. "And paid back what had been lost. We can't say how it might have gone if Uncle Nathan had lived. No doubt, sooner or late, he'd have done the same, for never would he let man or woman suffer if he could help it. Anyway, all be in the fair way to have their money again. And I asked Lawyer Popham long ago, when he came to Cadworthy, who 'twas, and he wouldn't say; but had no doubt we could guess. And then I asked Susan Hacker, and she wouldn't say, but yet came so near saying that there was little left to know. And to-day I tackled Uncle Humphrey and gave him no peace till 'twas out. 'To please himself' he's done it."

She panted for breath, and then continued —

"And there's more yet. 'Twas him paid up my married sister's legacy, and even Ned's not forgot — for justice. And when Uncle Humphrey dies — and far be it off — my brother Rupert's to have Cadworthy! I got that out of him too. But I've solemnly promised not to tell Rupert. He's going to tell him himself."

"A useful old fairy, and no mistake," laughed Heathman. "He'll beggar himself afore he's finished, and then you'll all have to set to work to keep him out of the workhouse!"

"He said that very thing," answered May, "and Susan said the same. Not that it makes any difference to him, for he hasn't got any comforts round him, and gets savage if you ask him so much as to take a hot brick to bed with him to warm himself in winter."

"All these things," said Mrs. Lintern, "have been done for honour of the name. Your folk go back along far — far into the past, and there's never been a cloud between them and honest dealing. But, when Heathman's father was cut off with his work unfinished, it happed that he left no money, and the many things that he had planned all fell short, without his mastermind to pick up the threads and bring them through. Then came Humphrey Baskerville, and for love of his brother and for love of the name, did these good deeds. And to beggar himself in money be nought in the eyes of that man, if he leaves his family rich in credit afore the eyes of the world. Such another was your own father, May; and such another is your brother Rupert; and such another was your cousin Mark. They had their own sight and looked at the world their own way and all saw it different, maybe; but they never saw justice different."

"And such be I," declared Heathman. "I can't call myself a Baskerville, and shan't get no thinner for that; but I'm the son of my mother, and she's worth a

shipload of any other sort — better than the whole flight of you Baskervilles, May — good though you be. And I'm very well pleased to be kin to you all, if you like, and if you don't like, you can leave it."

They parted then, and May returned home. Heathman showed himself highly gratified at what he had heard, and his sister shared his satisfaction. But their mother was sunk deep in the hidden places of her own heart, and they left her alone while they spoke together.

CHAPTER XII

JOE VOYSEY walked over one evening to talk with his lifelong friend Thomas Gollop. The gardener felt choked to the throat with injustice, and regarded his dismissal from the vicarage as an outrage upon society; while Mr. Gollop laboured under similar emotions.

Both declared that the ingratitude of Dennis Masterman was what principally stung them. To retire into private life caused them no pain; but to have been invited to do so was a bitter grievance.

Miss Eliza Gollop chanced to be out, and Thomas sat by the fire alone. His Bible stood on the table, but he was not reading it. Only when Voysey's knock sounded at the cottage door did Thomas wheel round from the fire, open the book and appear to be buried in its pages.

He had rather expected a visit from Mr. Masterman, hence these preparations; but when Voysey entered, Thomas modified his devout attitude and shut the Bible again.

"I half thought as that wretched man from the vicarage might call this evening," he said.

"He won't, then," replied Joe, "for he've got together all they fools who have fallen in with his wish about yowling carols at Christmas. Him and her be down at the schoolroom; and there's row enough rising up to fright the moon."

"Carol-singing! I wish the time was come for him to sing to his God for mercy," said Thomas.

Then he went to a cupboard and brought out a bottle of spirits.

"Have he said anything to you about a pension?" asked Voysey.

"No, not yet. I thought he might be coming in about that to-night. My father afore me got a pension — a shilling a day for life — and I ought to have twice as much, in my opinion, though I don't expect it. And when I've got all I can, I'm going to shake the dust off my boots against the man and his church too. Never again, till I'm carried in to my grave, will I go across the threshold — not so long as *he* be there. I'm going to take up with the Dissenters, and I advise you to do the same."

"That woman have told me about my pension," answered Joe — "Alice Masterman, I mean. I won't call her 'Miss', no more, for 'tis too respectful. She've worked on her brother — so she says — to give me three half-crowns a week. But I doubt she had anything to do with it — such a beastly stinge as her. However, that's the money; and who d'you think they've took on? That anointed fool the policeman's brother! He've been learning a lot of silliness down to a nurseryman at Plymouth, and he'm coming here, so bold as brass, and so noisy as a drum, to show what can be done with that garden. And if I don't look over the wall sometimes and have a laugh at him, 'tis pity!"

Gollop nodded moodily, but he did not answer. Then Joe proceeded with malevolent glee.

"I clear out on the last day of the year," he said; "and if I haven't picked the eyes out of his garden and got 'em settled in my patch afore that day——! She met me taking over a lot of mint plants a bit ago. 'Where be you taking they mint plants?' she said. 'To a neighbour,' I said. 'He wants 'em, and we can spare 'em.' 'You'll ask me, please, before you give things away, Voysey,' she said. And now I ax,

humble as a maggot, if I may take this or that to a neighbour afore I move a leaf. And she always says, 'Yes, if we can spare it.' Had her there — eh?"

"As for me," said Gollop, "I shall be the last regular right down parish clerk we ever have — unless the good old times come back later. A sexton he must use, since people have got to be buried, but who 'twill be I neither know nor care."

"Mind you take the tools," said Joe. "They be fairly your property, and you can sell 'em again if you don't want 'em yourself. I've made a good few shillings that way during the last forty years. But as for leaving the church, I shouldn't do that, because of the Christmas boxes. 'Tis well knowed in Shaugh that your Christmas boxes run into a tidy figure, and some people go so far as to say that what you take at the door, when the bettermost come out after Christmas morning prayer, is pretty near so good as what be dropped in the bags for the offerings."

"Lies," declared Thomas. "All envious lies. I never got near what the people thought. Still, I hadn't remembered. That's yet another thing where he'll have robbed me."

When Miss Eliza Gollop appeared half an hour later, she was cold and dispirited.

"What be you doing in here?" she said to Mr. Voysey.

"Having a tell with Thomas. We be both wishing to God we could strike them hateful people to the vicarage. Harm be bound to come to 'em, for their unchristian ways; but me and your brother would like to be in it."

"You'll be in it alone, then," she answered; "for this place have gone daft where they're concerned. They can't do no wrong seemingly — except to us.

The people babble about him, and even her, as if they was angels that had lost their wings."

"'Tis all lax and lawless and going to the dogs," said Thomas. "There's no truth and honesty and manliness left in Shaugh. The man found a human thigh-bone kicking about up under the top hedge of the churchyard yesterday. Lord knows where it had come from. I never seed it nowhere; but he turned on me and said 'twas sacrilege, and I know not what else. 'Where there's churchyards, there'll also be bones,' I said to the fool; 'and if one here and there works to the top, along of the natural heaving of the earth, how can a sexton or any other man help it?' A feeble creature, and making the young men feeble too. Carol-singing! Who wants carols? However, I've done with him. I've stood between him and his folly time and again; but never no more. Let him go."

"'Tis a knock-kneed generation," declared Mr. Voysey. "All for comfort and luxury. Tea, with sugar in it, have took the place of the good, honest, sour cider like what every man had in harvest days of old. But now, these here young youths, they say sharp cider turns their innards! It never used to turn ours. 'Tis all of a piece, and the nation's on the downward road, along of too much cosseting."

"For my part, I think 'tis more the weakness of mind than the weakness of body that be ruining us," observed Miss Gollop. "As a nurse I see more than you men can, and, as a female, I hear more than you do. And I will say that the way the people have taken these here doings of that scarlet woman to Undershaugh is a sin and a scandal. At first they wouldn't believe it, though I blew the trumpet of truth in their ears from the moment that Dissenter died; but, afterwards, when 'twas known as a fact and

the parties couldn't deny it, and Mr. Waite throwed over Cora Lintern, as any respecting man would when he heard the shameful truth — then who came to me and said, 'Ah, you was right, Eliza, and I was wrong'? Not one of 'em! And what's worse is the spirit they've taken it in. Nobody cares, though everybody ought to care!"

"Every person says 'tis none of their business," explained Voysey.

"More shame to 'em!" declared Thomas. "As if it wasn't the business of all decent men and women. Time was when such an incontinent terror of a woman would have been stoned out of the village in the name of law and righteousness. Yet now, mention the thing where I will, 'tis taken with a heathen calmness that makes my blood boil. And Masterman worst of all, mind! If it wasn't a case for a scorching sermon, when was there one? Yet not a word. And not a word from the Dissenters neither — not in the meeting-house — though 'tis a subject they'm very great against most times. However, I've inquired and I find it has been passed over."

"No godly anger anywhere," admitted Eliza, "and not one word of sorrow to me for the hard things what were spoken when I stood up single-handed and told the truth."

"Religion be dying out of the nation," summed up Thomas. "My father always said that me and Eliza would live to see antichrist ascend his throne; and it begins to look as if the times were very near ripe for the man. And 'twill be harder than ever now — now I'm driven out from being parish clerk. For I shall have to look on and yet be powerless to strike a blow."

They drank in gloomy silence; but Mr. Voysey was not similarly oppressed by the moral breakdown

of the times. He strove to bring conversation back to the vicarage, and failing to do so, soon took his leave.

After he had gone the brother and sister debated long, and Thomas gave it as his opinion that it would be well for them to leave Shaugh and end their days in a more Christian and congenial atmosphere.

"There's nought to keep us now," he said; "all have gone down afore that Masterman, and 'tis something of a question whether such as we ought to bide here, simply as common folk with no more voice in the parish. If we go, the blame lies on his shoulders; but once I make up my mind, I won't stop — not though the people come before me and beg on their bended knees for me to do so."

"'Twould be like Adam and Eve being driven out of the Garden if we'm forced to go," declared Eliza.

"With this difference, however, that the blame ban't with us, though the punishment may be. There's nobody can say we've ever done wrong here, or gone outside our duty to God or man by a hair. If we go, 'tis them that drive us out will have to pay for their wickedness."

"They'll certainly smart, if 'tis only in the long run," confessed Eliza. "'Twill be brought home against them at the appointed time."

Thomas nodded drearily.

"Cold comfort," he said, "but the only satisfaction there is to be got out of it by us. Yes, I shall go; I shall shake off the dust for a witness. I wish I thought as 'twould choke a party here and there; but, thank God, I know my place. I never offered to do His almighty work, and I never will. I never wanted to call down thunder from heaven on the evil-doer. But 'tis always a tower of faith to a righteous man when he sees the Lord strike. And to them as be weak in faith, 'tis often a puzzle and a temptation to see how long the Lord holds off, when justice cries aloud to Him to rise up and do His worst."

CHAPTER XIII

AT the approach of another Christmas, Humphrey Baskerville stood in the churchyard of St. Edward's and watched two masons lodge the stone that he had raised to his brother Nathan. It conformed to the usual pattern of the Baskerville memorials, and was of slate. The lettering had been cut deep and plain without addition of any ornament. The accidental severity and simplicity of the stone contrasted to advantage with Vivian's ornate and tasteless marble beside it.

Dennis Masterman walked across the churchyard presently and, seeing Humphrey, turned and approached.

"Good morning," he said. "Glad you've put a slate here. I like them better than these garish things. They are more suited to this grey Moor world of ours."

"'Tis a foolish waste to spend money on the dead," answered Mr. Baskerville. "When all the living be clothed and fed, then we can fling away our money over graves. 'Tis only done to please ourselves, not to please them."

"You've a right to speak," said the clergyman. "To praise you would be an impertinence; but as the priest of Him we both worship, I rejoice to think of what you have done to clear the clouded memory of this man."

Humphrey took no verbal notice of these remarks. He shrugged his shoulders and spoke of the gravestone.

"I'll thank you to read what I've put over him, and say whether 'tis not right and just."

The other obeyed. After particulars of Nathan's age and the date of his death, there followed only the first verse of the forty-first Psalm —

"*Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*"

"You see," explained Mr. Baskerville, "my brother did consider the poor—and none else. That he made a botch of it, along of bad judgment and too much hope and too much trust in himself, is neither here nor there; for I hold his point of view was well-meaning though mistaken. If we see a man's point of view, it often leads—I won't say to mercy, for that's no business of ours in my opinion—but to the higher justice. To judge by results is worldly sense, but I'm doubtful if 'tis heavenly sense. Anyway, that's how I feel about my brother now, though 'twas only brought home to me after a year of thinking; and as for the end of the text, certainly that happened, because none can doubt the Lord delivered him in the time of trouble. His death was a deliverance, as every death must be, but none more than Nathan's afore the tempest broke."

Masterman—knowing as little as the other what Nathan's death had brought to Nathan of mental agony before the end—conceded these points freely. They walked together in the churchyard and spoke of moral topics and religious instruction. At a point in the enclosure, the younger stopped and indicated a space remote from the lodges of the silent people.

"You design to lie here—is it not so? Gollop, I remember, told me, a long time ago now."

The old man regarded the spot indifferently and shook his head.

"I meant it once—not now. We change our

most fixed purposes under the battering of the world; and small enough our old thoughts often look, when seen again, after things have happened and years have passed. I'll creep to join my own, if you please. They won't mind, I reckon, if I sink into the pit beside 'em. I'll go by my wife and my son and my brothers. We'll all rise and brave the Trump together, as well as erring man may."

The stone was set in its place presently and Mr. Baskerville, well pleased with the result, set off homeward. His tethered pony stood at the gate, and he mounted and went slowly up the hill.

CHAPTER XIV

"SOME say they believe the old saying and some say they don't," declared Mr. Abraham Elford to a thin bar at six o'clock on Christmas Eve; "but for my part I know what I've proved to be true with my own eyes, and I will stick to it that apples picked at wane of moon do shrivel and scrump up cruel. In fact, for hoarding they be no use at all."

"And you swear that you've proved that?" asked Mr. Head in his most judicial manner. "You stand there, a man up home sixty years of age, and steadfastly declare that apples gathered when the moon be on the wane do dry up quicker than others that be plucked when it begins to grow?"

"Yes, I do," declared the innkeeper. "Don't I tell you that I've proved it? Pick your apples when the moon be first horning, that's my advice."

They wrangled upon the question, and missed its real interest as an example of the value of evidence and the influence of superstition and individual idiosyncrasy on all human testimony.

Jack scoffed, Abraham Elford grew warm; for who is there that can endure to hear his depositions brushed aside as worthless?

Upon this great topic of the shrinking of apples at wane of moon, some sided with Mr. Head; while others, who held lunar influence as a force reaching into dark mysteries of matter and mind, supported the publican.

The contention was brisk, and not until it began to interfere with the nightly sale of his liquor, did Elford

awake to its danger and stop it. He conceded nothing, but declared the argument must cease.

"'Tis Christman Eve," said he, "and no occasion for any short words or sharp sayings. Me and Head both know that we'm right, and mountains wouldn't move either of us from our opinions, so let it be."

He lifted a great earthen pot from the fire in the bar parlour. It contained cider with pieces of toast floating in it.

"Pretty drinking, as I'm certain sure that one and all of you will say," foretold the host.

Apples, however, rose again to be first topic of conversation before this fine wassail, and Jack spoke once more.

"Time was, down to the in country, that on this night — or else Old Christman Eve, I forget which — we gawks should all have marched out solemn to the orchards and sung lucky songs, and poured out cider, and fired our guns into the branches, and made all-round heathen fools of ourselves. And why? Because 'twas thought that to do so improved the next year's crop a thousandfold! And when we remember that 'twas no further back than our fathers that they did such witless things, it did ought to make us feel humble, I'm sure."

"Don't talk no more about cider, drink it," said Heathman Lintern, who was of the company. "Drink it while 'tis hot, and 'twill warm your bones and soften your opinions. You'm so peart to-night and so sharp at the corners, that I reckon you've got your money back at last."

This direct attack reduced Mr. Head to a less energetic and dogmatic frame of mind.

"No," he answered. "I have not, and I happen to know that I never shall. Me and the old chap fell out, and I dressed him down too sharp. I was wrong, and I've since admitted it, for I'm the rare,

fearless sort that grant I'm wrong the first minute it can be proved against me. Though when a man's built on that large pattern, you may be sure he ban't wrong very often. 'Tis only the peddling, small creatures that won't admit they're mistaken — out of a natural fear that if they once allow it, they'll never be thought right again. But though he's forgiven me, I've strained the friendship. So we live and learn."

"Coode's had his money again," said the host of 'The White Thorn.'

"He has — the drunken dog? There's only me left," returned Jack.

"It wasn't till after he lost his money that he took to swilling, however," declared the innkeeper. "I know him well. The misfortune ruined his character."

"His daughter's been paid back, all the same," said Lintern. "She keeps his house, and the old boy gave the money to her, to be used or saved according as she thinks best."

"That leaves only me," said Jack.

"Me and Rupert was running over the figures a bit ago," continued Heathman. "We made out that the sporting old blade had dropped upwards of six thousand over this job, and we was wondering how much that is out of all he's got."

"A fleabite, I reckon," answered Head; but the other doubted it.

"Rupert says he thinks 'tis pretty near half of his fortune, if not more. He goes shabbier than ever, and he eats little better than orts for his food."

"That's no new thing," said another man as he held a mug for some more of the hot cider; "'twas always so, as Susan Hacker will tell you. My wife have heard her grumbling off and on these ten years about it. His food's poor and coarse, like his baccy and his

cider. His clothes be kept on his back till there ban't enough of the web left to hold 'em together any longer. Susan offered an old coat to a tramp once, thinking to get it away afore Baskerville missed it; and the tramp looked it over — through and through, you might say — and he thanked Susan as saucy as you please, and told her that when he was going to set up for a mommet[1] he'd let her know, but 'twouldn't be yet."

"A strange old night-hawk, and always have been," said Head. "Not a man — not even me, though I know him best — can measure him altogether. Never was such a mixture. Now he's so good-natured as the best stone, and you'll go gaily driving into him and then, suddenly, you'll strike flint, and get a spark in your eye, and wish to God you'd left the man alone. He's beyond any well-balanced mind to understand, as I've told him more than once."

"Meek as Moses one minute, then all claws and prickles the next — so they tell me," declared Abraham Elford. "But whether 'tis true or not, I can't say from experience," he added, "for the man don't come in here."

"And why?" said Heathman. "That's another queer side of him. I axed him that same question, and he said because to his eyes the place was haunted by my father. 'I should see Nathan's long beard wagging behind the bar,' he said to me, 'and I couldn't abide it.'"

"He's above common men, no doubt," declared another speaker. "We can only leave him at that. He's a riddle none here will ever guess, and that's the last word about him."

Rupert Baskerville came in at this moment and saw Heathman. Both were in Dennis Masterman's carol choir, and it was time that they gathered with the rest

[1] *Mommet* — scarecrow.

at the vicarage, for a long round of singing awaited them.

"A mild night and the roads pretty passable," he announced. "We're away in half an hour wi' books and lanterns; but no musickers be coming with us, like in the good old days. Only voices to carry it off."

He stopped to drink, and the sight of Jack Head reminded him of a commission.

"I want you, Jack," he said. "Come out in the ope-way for half a moment."

They departed together, and in a few moments returned. Rupert was laughing, Mr. Head exhibited the liveliest excitement. In one hand he waved three ten-pound notes; with the other he chinked some gold and silver.

"Money! Money! Money, souls!" he shouted. "If that baggering old hero haven't paid me after all! Give it a name, boys, drinks round!"

They congratulated him and liquor flowed. Head was full of rejoicing. He even exhibited gratitude.

"You might say 'twas no more than justice," he began; "but I tell you he's more than just — he's a very generous old man, and nobody can deny it, and I for one would like to do something to pay him back."

"There's nought you can do," declared Elford, "but be large-minded about it, and overlook the little smart that always touches a big mind when it's asked to accept favours."

"Not a big mind," corrected Rupert. "'Tis only a small mind can't take favours. And the thought of giving that smart would pain my uncle, for he's terrible tender and he's smarted all his life, and knows what 'tis to feel so."

"Smart be damned!" said Mr. Head. "There's

no smart about getting back your own. I'm only glad that he felt the call to pay; and, though I was kept to the last, I shan't quarrel about that. If Rupert here, as be his nephew and his right hand by all accounts, could hit on a thing for us to do that would please the man, then I say us might do it without loss of credit. There's nobody has anything serious against him, I believe, nowadays, unless it be Abraham here, because he never comes inside his bar."

The publican shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't quarrel for that," he said, "since he goeth nowhere else either."

They considered the possible ways of bringing any satisfaction to Humphrey Baskerville, but could hit on no happy project. Head, indeed, was fertile of ideas, but Rupert found objections to all of them.

"If us could only do something that meant a lot of different chaps all of one mind," said Heathman. "The old bird always thinks that the people hate him or laugh at him, and if we could somehow work a trick that showed a score of folk all meaning well to him and thinking well of him for once —— But Lord knows what."

Then came an interruption in the shape of Dennis Masterman. He was warm and somewhat annoyed. He turned upon the guilty Rupert and Heathman.

"This is too bad, you fellows!" he said. "Here we're all waiting and waiting, and, despite my express wishes, you turn in to drink. I blame you both."

They expressed the liveliest regret, and Dennis was speedily mollified when he heard the great argument that had made these men forget the business of the night.

"There's no time now," he answered, "but you're in the right to think of such a thing, and, after Christmas, I shall be only too glad to lend a hand. A very admirable idea, and I'm glad you've hit on it."

"Just a thimbleful of my wassail, your honour, for luck," said the host, and Masterman, protesting, took the glass handed to him.

A sudden and violent explosion from Mr. Head made the clergyman nearly choke in the middle of his drinking.

"I've got it!" cried Jack so loudly that the company started. He slapped his leg at the same moment and then danced with exaggerated rejoicing.

"Got what? D.T.'s?" asked Heathman.

"Go up along to Hawk House! I beg and pray your reverence to go there first of all," urged Jack. "Surely 'tis the very thing. 'Tis just what we was trying to light upon — summat that meant the showing of general friendship — summat that meant a bit of trouble and thought taken for him — all your blessed Christmas vartues put together — goodwill and all the rest of it. If you was to steal up through the garden by the greenside and then burst forth like one man — why, there 'tis! Who can deny 'tis a noble idea? And you can go and holler to the quality afterwards."

"Good for you, Jack!" answered Rupert. "And I say ditto with all my heart if Mr. Masterman ——"

"Come, then," interrupted Dennis. "The night will be gone before we start. We'll go to Hawk House right away. I can't gainsay such a wish, though it's a mile out of the beat we had planned. Come!"

The clergyman, with Rupert Baskerville and Heathman Lintern, hurried off, and a few of the younger men, accompanied by Jack Head, followed after them.

"I must just pop in my house and lock up this dollop of money," said Jack; "then us'll go up over with the singers to see how the old Hawk takes it. He'll be scared first; and then he'll try to look as if

he was going to fling brickbats out of the windows, or set the dogs at us; and all the time we shall very well know that he's bubbling over with surprise to find what a number of respectable people have got to thinking well of him."

The crowd of men and boys moved on ahead of Jack and his friends. The shrill cries and laughter of the youngsters and a bass rumble of adult voices wakened night, and a dozen lanterns flashed among the company as they ascended into the silent darkness of Dartmoor.

CHAPTER XV

HUMPHREY BASKERVILLE had hoped that his nephew might visit him on Christmas Eve; but he learned that it was impossible, because Rupert had joined the carol-singers, and would be occupied with them on a wide circle of song.

After dark he sat alone until near seven o'clock; then Mrs. Hacker returned home and they took their supper together.

The meal ended, she cleared it away and settled to her knitting. Talk passed between them not unmarked by sentiment, for it concerned the past and related to those changes the year had brought. On the following day Humphrey was to eat his Christmas dinner at Cadworthy, and Susan hoped to spend the festival with friends in Shaugh.

"I've got Heathman and his mother to be of the company," said Mr. Baskerville. "The daughters are both about their own business, and one goes to her sweetheart, and Cora's down to Plymouth, so we shall escape from them and no harm done. But Heathman and his mother will be there. They are rather a puzzle to me, Susan."

"No doubt," she replied. "You'll go on puzzling yourself over this party or that till you've puzzled yourself into the workhouse. Haven't you paid all the creditors to the last penny?"

"Not so," he answered. "That's where it lies. A man's children and their mother are his first creditors, I should reckon. They've got first call in justice, if not in law. I judge that there's a fine

bit of duty there, and the way they look at life — so much my own way 'tis — makes me feel —— I wrote to that bad Cora yesterday. She's working hard, I'm told."

Susan sniffed.

"So does the Devil," she said. "'Tis all very well for you, I suppose; because when you wake up some morning and discover as you've got nought left in the world but your night-shirt, you'll go about to them you've befriended to seek for your own again — and lucky you'll be if you find it, or half of it; but what of me?"

"You'll never want," he declared. "You're the sort always to fall on your feet."

"So's young Lintern for that matter. No need to worry about him. He's a lesson, if you like. The man to be contented whatever haps."

"I know it. I've marked it. I've learnt no little from him. A big heart and a mighty power of taking life as it comes without fuss. There's a bad side to it, however, as well as a good. I've worked that out. It's good for a man to be contented, but no good for the place he lives in. Contented people never stir up things, or throw light into dark corners, or let air into stuffy places. Content means stagnation so oft as not."

"They mind their own business, however."

"They mostly do; and that's selfish wisdom so oft as not. Now Jack Head's never content, and never will be."

"Don't name that man on Christmas Eve!" said Mrs. Hacker testily. "I hate to think of him any day of the week, for that matter."

"Yet him and the east wind both be useful, little as you like 'em. For my part, I've been a neighbour to the east wind all my life and shared its

quality in the eyes of most folk — till now. But the wind of God be turning out of the east for me, Susan."

"So long as you be pleased with yourself—— And as for content, 'tisn't a vartue, 'tis an accident, like red hair or bow-legs. You can't get it, nor yet get away from it, by taking thought."

He nodded.

"You're in the right there. One man will make more noise if he scratches his finger than another if he breaks his leg. 'Tis part of the build of the mind, and don't depend on chance. Same with misery — that's a matter of character, not condition. I know men that won't be wretched while they can draw their breath; and some won't be happy, though they've got thrice their share of good fortune. No doubt that's how Providence levels up, and gives the one what he can't enjoy, to balance him with the other, who's got nought, but who's also got the blessed power of making happiness out of nought."

"You've found the middle way, I suppose," she said; "and, like others who think they're on the sure road to happiness, you be pushing along too fast."

"Running myself out of breath — eh? But you're wrong. I'm too cautious for that. If I'm a miser, as the people still think here and there, then 'tis for peace I'm a miser. 'Twas always peace of mind that I hungered and hankered for, yet went in doubt if such a thing there was. And even now, though I seem three-parts along the road to it, I feel a cold fear often enough whether my way will stand all weathers. It may break down yet."

"Not while your money lasts," she answered with a short laugh.

He followed his own thoughts in silence, and then spoke aloud again.

"Restless as the fox, and hungrier than ever he was. Every man's hand against me, as I thought, and mine held out to every man; but they wouldn't see it. None to come to my hearth willingly, though 'twas always hot for 'em; none to look into my meaning, though that meaning was always meant for kindness. But who shall blame any living creature that they thought me an enemy and not a friend? How should they know? Didn't I hide the scant good that was in me, more careful than the bird her nest?"

"They be up to your tricks now, anyway; and I've helped to show 'em better, though you may not believe it," declared Susan. "What a long-tongued, well-meaning female could do I've done for you; and I always shall say so."

"I know that," he said. "There's no good thing on earth than can't be made better, but one thing. And that's the thing in all Christian minds this night — I mean the thing called love. You know it — you deal in it. Out of your kind soul you've always felt friendly to me, and you saw what I had the wish but not the power to show to others; and you've done your share of the work to make the people like me better. Maybe 'tis mostly your doing, if we could but read into the truth of it."

This work-a-day world must for ever fall far short of the humblest ethical ideal, and doubtless even those who fell prostrate at the shout of their Thunder Spirit, or worshipped the sun and the sea in the morning of days, guessed dimly how their kind lacked much of perfection. To them the brooding soul of humanity revealed the road, though little knew those early men the length of it; little they understood that the goal of any faultless standard must remain a shifting ideal within reach of mind alone.

At certain points Baskerville darkly suspected weak places in this new armour of light. While his days had, indeed, achieved a consummation and orbicular completeness beyond all hope; while, looking backward, he could not fail to contrast noontide gloom with sunset light, the fierce equinox of autumn with this unfolding period of a gracious Indian summer now following upon it; yet, even here, there fell a narrow shadow of cloud; there wakened a wind not unedged. In deep and secret thought he had drifted upon that negation of justice involved by the Golden Rule. He saw, what every intellect worthy a name must see: that to do as you would be done by, to withhold the scourge from the guilty shoulder, to suffer the weed to flourish in the garden, to shield our fellowmen from the consequence of their evil or folly, is to put the individual higher than society, and to follow a precept that ethics in evolution has long rejected.

But he shirked his dilemma: he believed it not necessary to pursue the paradox to its bitter end. The Golden Rule he hypostatised into a living and an omnipresent creed; henceforth it was destined to be his criterion of every action; and to his doubting spirit he replied, that if not practicable in youth, if not convenient for middle age, this principle might most justly direct the performance and stimulate the thought of the old. Thus he was, and knew himself, untrue to the clearer, colder conviction of his reasoning past; but in practice this defection brought a peace so exalted, a content so steady, a recognition so precious, that he rested his spirit upon it in faith and sought no further.

Now he retraced his time, and made a brief and pregnant summary thereof for Susan's ear.

"'Tis to be spoken in a score of words," he said. "My life has been a storm in a teacup; but none the

less a terrible storm for me until I won the grace to still it. Port to the sailor-man be a blessed thing according to the voyage that's gone afore. The worse that, the better the peace of the haven when he comes to it."

She was going to speak, but a sound on the stillness of night stopped her.

"Hark!" was all she said.

Together they rose and went to his outer door.

The gibbous moon sailed through a sky of thin cloud, and light fell dimly upon the open spaces, but sparkled in the great darkness of evergreen things about the garden. Earth rolled night-hidden to the southern hills, and its breast was touched with sparks of flame, where glimmered those few habitations visible from this place. A lattice of naked boughs meshed the moonlight under the slope of the hill, and from beneath their shadows ascended a moving thread of men and boys. They broke the stillness with speech and laughter and their red lantern-light struck to right and left and killed the wan moonshine as they came.

"What's toward now?" asked Mr. Baskerville, staring blankly before him.

"Why," cried Susan, "'tis the carol-singers without a doubt! They'll want an ocean of beer presently, and where shall us get it from?"

"Coming to me — coming to sing to *me!*" he mumbled. "Good God, a thing far beyond my utmost thought is this!"

The crowd rolled clattering up, and the woman stayed to welcome them; but the man ran back into his house, sat down in his chair, bent forward to listen and clasped his hands tightly between his knees.

Acute emotion marked his countenance; but this painful tension passed when out of the night there rolled the melodious thunder of an ancient tune.

"Singing for me!" he murmured many times while the old song throbbed.

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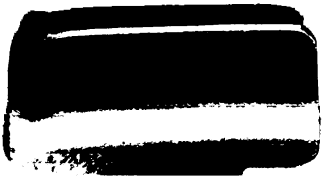

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